

LEGISLATING LEARNING:
WHAT HAPPENED IN THE PROCESS

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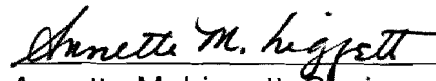
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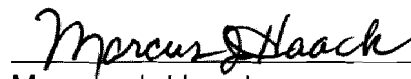
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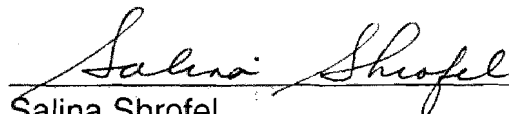
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LEGISLATING LEARNING: WHAT HAPPENED IN THE PROCESS?

An Abstract of a Dissertation by
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The Problem: The intent of this qualitative research is to explore policymakers' perceptions of Iowa's House File 2272 (1998), the Accountability for Student Learning Act. This study describes the policy process as it applied to enactment of HF2272, and is guided by three central questions: What factors led legislators to pass HF2272? What did policy makers hope to accomplish with HF2272? How do policy makers perceive the legislation four years later?

Procedures: Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 26 policymakers at the state level, as well as through review of documents related to the Act (HF2272). The document reviews and interviews were transcribed, coded, analyzed, and findings developed.

Findings: Policy makers identified several factors that led to the need for educational accountability legislation, but they were not in agreement about the intent of the bill. In hindsight, policy makers expressed several impressions – both negative and positive – about the policy process and the impact of HF 2272.

Conclusions: Analysis of the findings led to four conclusions. First, factors outside of Iowa had significant impact on the Iowa educational policy climate. Second, when threatened with the danger of losing Iowa's reputation as a leader in education, policy makers responded with a bill they felt would help to restore Iowa's educational status. Third, educational policy making isn't just about education. Fourth, policy makers spent more time analyzing the impact of HF 2272 after its enactment than before voting to support the bill.

Recommendations: Suggestions for improving the policy process included the need for accurate information in policy design, as well the need for foresight regarding theories of action and possible impacts of policy. Increased communication with policy implementers would assist policy makers in developing educational accountability legislation that can more effectively meet educational goals.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

More and more, daily life in the K – 12 classroom is significantly affected by those who rarely enter that setting. Educational policy mandated from ‘above’ – from the federal and the state level – is changing the way that schools do business. Increasingly, these policy demands are centered on concepts of accountability. If policy makers have found it necessary to mandate schools to be more accountable, they have done so no doubt based on the assumption that schools have not been accountable enough in the past. How have policy makers’ notions of school accountability changed in recent years? What problems do policy makers perceive that call for accountability measures? What processes do policy makers employ to craft solutions for these problems?

The journey from a “problem” to a “policy solution” is not a linear nor simple voyage (Rosenthal, 1998; see also Rist, 1998). By exploring the policy process that state level policy makers employed in enacting a particular piece of state-level educational accountability legislation, this study attempted to add some insight into these questions. Specifically, this study explores how Iowa came to pass HF 2272 (1998), Iowa’s Accountability for Student Learning Act (Appendix A).

Background

Education is a power reserved to the states by the United States Constitution. State constitutions charge state legislatures with the responsibility

for establishing and maintaining a system of public schools. The states' systems of public schools have, in turn, been traditionally founded on local control of public schools. However, the last several decades have witnessed significant change in the amount of direction schools have received from federal and state governments. A steady growth of state influence has taken place since the 1960s. During the 1980s and 1990s, the amount of state control over local school districts increased even more dramatically (Wirt & Kirst, 1989; see also Epstein, 1996; Fuhrman, Clune, & Elmore, 1988; Kuchapski, 1998; Rosenthal, 1990; Weaver & Geske, 1997). At the same time, the federal government was relinquishing much of its educational control (Mazzoni, 1994).

Partnered with this movement toward more state control has been a similar movement demanding more accountability from the schools (Adams & Kirst, 1999; Tucker & Clark, 1999). While accountability has long been a factor in school reform movements, the emphasis of reform shifted in the 1980s from equity to excellence. Accountability concerns changed from compliance with regulations to the quality of education as measured by student achievement (Swanson & Stevenson, 2002; Fuhrman, Clune & Elmore, 1988). This focus on accountability for student achievement is reflected by the fact that forty-nine of the fifty states have mandated statewide student performance standards. Iowa continues to be the only state in the nation that does not require some type of statewide performance standard from K-12 public schools (Goetz & Duffy, 2001).

The Iowa Context

The fact that Iowa remains the lone “hold-out” state in establishing statewide student performance standards lends credence to the assumption that, while Iowa’s history mirrors national trends in some ways, it remains singularly unique. Iowa’s idiosyncrasy – and its fervent alliance with the sacredness of local control -- is further revealed in a brief glimpse at the Iowa Constitution. The Iowa Constitution charges the legislature to “encourage, by all suitable means, the promotion of intellectual, scientific, moral and agricultural improvement,” and also establishes a State Board of Education (Constitution of the State of Iowa, Art. IX, § 2, cl. 3). However, writers of the Iowa Constitution were uneasy about investing too much control by the State Board over the local district schools (Aurner, 1914). Therefore, although the Board of Education was given “full power and authority to legislate and make all needful rules and regulations in relation to Common Schools” (Constitution of the State of Iowa, Art. IX, § 1, cl. 1), the legislature was given the authority to alter, amend, or repeal all acts, rules and regulations made by the Board. Additionally, the Constitution provides for the abolishment of the State Board by the legislature – which it promptly did as one of its first legislative acts in 1864 (Shambaugh, 1934). Therefore, delineation of the state’s role in education in the Iowa Constitution, is extremely slim. Alone among state Constitutions, the Iowa Constitution contains little direct reference to the state’s interest in its public schools. In 1909, The Iowa General Assembly did

pass a bill re-creating a state board of education, but it is no longer a Constitutional body.

As federal and states role in educational policy shifted over the years, Iowa's legislation action has been following suit. Accountability measures in Iowa have also followed the national trend – in a uniquely Iowan fashion. As early as 1965, the state legislature directed the State Board of Education to adopt and approve standards for schools (Iowa House File 55, 1965). A decade later, in 1974, a bill was passed in the Iowa Legislature that required each school district to develop long-range improvement plans for their educational programs. This bill was eventually written into code, as Section 280.12. Specifically, this bill called for an evaluation of the district's educational program to include major educational needs (ranked in order of priority), long-range plans to meet such needs, short-range plans to attain desired levels of pupil achievement to be evaluated yearly, a record of progress under the plan, and "such reports of progress as the superintendent of public instruction shall require" (Iowa Department of Education, 1998).

In 1985, legislation passed that added further requirements to Section 280.12. These additional requirements included the creation of a local advisory committee to make recommendations to the local school boards. This advisory committee was to include students, parents, teacher, administrators, and representatives from the community. Additionally, reports of progress toward the

long-range educational plans were to be made available to the advisory committee, the community, and the State Department of Education.

In 1987, the concept of state-required local goals was introduced through legislation that eventually became Section 280.18 of the Iowa Code. Local schools were mandated to “adopt goals that will improve student achievement at each grade level in the skills listed... (reading, writing, speaking, listening, mathematics, reasoning, studying, and technological literacy).... In order to achieve the goal of improving student achievement and performance on a statewide basis” (Iowa Department of Education, 1998). These goals also became the basis of the annual progress that schools reported to the community and to the State Board of Education.

In 1997, the United States Department of Education approved a written plan for the state, known as the “Iowa Model.” This plan was developed in order to meet the intent of the recently re-authorized federal *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), also known as the *Improving American’s Schools Act*. Regulations of this federal act required states to set challenging standards for all students, to measure student and school progress toward meeting those standards, and to hold schools accountable for the results that they achieve. While Iowa was allowed to waive some federal requirements, it was required to submit a plan for approval outlining Iowa’s plan for meeting the intent of the ESEA. Thus, the “Iowa Model” was developed, incorporating then current portions of the Iowa Code in place for accreditation of schools, and

adding requirements to establish challenging content standards, multiple measures of assessment, and student performance standards with at least three designated levels of student performance (Thuente, 2002).

The peak of state level educational accountability policy activity occurred a year later. In 1998, the Iowa General Assembly passed House File 2272, known as the Accountability for Student Learning Act. This legislation mandated that accountability for student achievement be incorporated into the state education accreditation process. The bill specified that these accountability procedures include a school improvement plan developed by each district that involves parents and the community in establishing local education standards. School districts must also demonstrate the use of multiple assessment measures in determining student achievement levels. The bill also called for a set of core academic indicators to measure student performance in mathematics and reading in grades 4, 8, and 11 and science in grades 8 and 11, graduation rates, and information about students rates of post-secondary education. The bill required that each school district submit an annual report of progress on the core indicators and other locally set student learning goals to the State Department of Education. Each district must also report building-level results to the community. The State Department of Education is required to compile an annual report of state data for each state indicator.

After the passage of HF 2272 in April of 1998, the bill evolved through the process of rules writing and rules approval. Eventually, in 1999, regulations for

accreditation were defined in Chapter 12 of the Iowa Administrative Code to reflect the changes mandated in HF 2272. One significant requirement added through the rules process was the stipulation that at least one of the multiple measures of student achievement include a “districtwide assessment [that] shall allow for the comparison of the school or school district’s students with students from across the state and in the nation in reading, mathematics, and science” (Iowa Department of Education, 1999, Ch. 12, p. 14). While these revised accreditation requirements are not statewide standards, they certainly represent a higher level of state mandated “standardization”, and a greater degree of accountability demands for students’ academic achievement, than ever experienced in Iowa’s public school history. If HF 2272 is indeed a way for “Iowa, the only state still shunning uniform academic standards, to slip a few of them through the back door” (Keller, 1997); it is a marked departure from Iowa’s long held claim to local control of schools, and indicates a shift in the state’s educational policy direction.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to add understanding of the policy process by exploring how the process occurred in the development HF 2272. It is also hoped that those experiencing the impacts of HF 2272 regulations in the classroom will gain a clearer understanding of the policy makers’ intents, and will be able to apply that understanding to their implementation efforts. Additionally, it is hoped that those responsible for developing policy will gain a clearer

understanding of the process, and consider some of the implications and recommendations offered as they consider developing future policy

Statement of Problem

The problem of this qualitative research study was to describe and analyze policymakers' perceptions of the intent and implementation of Iowa's House File 2272, the Accountability for Student Learning Act. The study was guided by three central questions:

1. What factors led to the enactment of HF 2272?
2. What did policy makers hope to accomplish with HF 2272?
3. What were policymakers' perceptions of HF 2272 four years later?

Methods

This qualitative study was designed using a naturalistic inquiry approach. Data was gathered primarily through semi-structured interviews with 26 state level policy makers selected through purposive sampling. These interviews were held face to face and were audio taped. The tape recordings were transcribed verbatim. Data was also gathered through analysis of legislative records, news briefs, State Department of Education publications and other pertinent documents. The interview transcriptions and document notes were coded and sorted into themes using constant comparison methodology. Analysis of themes led to findings and conclusions of the study.

Limitations of the Study

Subjectivity is acknowledged as being a part of qualitative research, though the notion that subjectivity is necessarily something negative is frequently challenged. Glesne (1999) declares that subjectivity, once recognized, can be monitored for more trustworthy research. Every effort was made to acknowledge the researcher's subjective perspective and to recognize the influence that it may have had on this research.

It is not the intent of this research project that findings can be generalized to other policy development experiences. Each experience is contextually bound in terms of culture, climate, history, and the individual participants in the process. At best, meaning from this study may be derived as a 'working hypothesis' intended to add understanding to this particular process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

A number of political factors unique to this context were considered as this research was conducted and interpreted. While the researcher's relationship as a legislator's spouse allowed an advantage in certain access issues, it may have also posed a barrier in others. Because this legislator was a member of the minority party, affiliation with him may have lead to partisan influences on individuals' participation.

Additionally, the Iowa General Assembly in session at the time of this research owned its share of pressing issues and current crises. The fact that this study was conducted four years after the passage of HF 2272, in addition to the current preoccupation of policymakers, may have contributed to some historical

clouding of their perceptions of the policy design process in question. A copy of the bill as it passed in 1998 (Appendix A) was provided to all participants, yet this artifact obviously cannot recapture the thoughts and actions of participants at that particular moment in time. Conceptualizing policy formulation as cyclic, however, indicates that hindsight perceptions have some advantages and may be just as valuable in the study of policy (Rist, 1998).

Definition of Terms

The abbreviation "HF2272" is used to refer to House File 2272, the Accountability for Student Learning Act, passed by the Iowa legislature in 1998. The term "policy makers" refers to individuals involved with creating and enacting legislative policy. For the purposes of this study, the term "policy makers" includes three subgroups: legislators, policy advisors, and state department officials. Legislators are elected officials who were members of the Iowa House of Representatives or the Iowa Senate during the term in which HF2272 was introduced and passed. Policy advisors are individuals who are a part of the informational system provided to legislators. In this study, policy advisors included legislative research staff, members of the governor's staff, and legislative liaisons of professional educational organizations. State department officials in this study are individuals who hold positions in the Iowa State Department of Education.

Research Note

This study was one of seven studies done at Drake University that explored the 1998 state education policy, House File 2272 and sought insight and information from both state level policy influentials and local school district personnel. These studies, initiated by a First in the Nation in Education (FINE) Foundation grant, were intended to analyze the policy intent and implementation impact on local teachers and administrators in a wide range of schools and school districts across Iowa. Taken together, it is hoped that these studies would provide insight into how the state might improve its policy-making capacity in education. The support of the FINE Foundation in carrying out this research is gratefully acknowledged. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of this foundation and no official endorsement should be inferred.

Organization of This Report

The research conducted is reported in five chapters. This first chapter provides an overview of the background, purpose, and problem being researched. The second chapter reviews pertinent research literature related to the study. In the third chapter, an explanation of the research methodology is provided. The fourth chapter reports the findings of the study, and includes as well a discussion of the findings. Conclusions, implications, and recommendations are included in the fifth chapter.

Chapter 2

BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The State's Changing Role in Education Policy

Beginning in the 1980s, the amount of state level educational policy activity increased to a level unprecedented since the formation of the common school system (Firestone & Fuhrman, 1991). Several interpretive frames have been offered as reasons for this shift in educational control. Mazzoni (1994) reviews analytical literature and cites three such interpretations offered as contributing forces. One interpretation for this shift in power is yet another predictable cycle of education reform. A second interpretation sees international economic, political, and social pressures pushing for more state involvement in educational policy as a mechanism for competing in a global economy. The third interpretation offered is that sluggish economic growth coincided with a release of some well-publicized reports of the "softening" of American schools and led to pressures on the states to "do something" about their schools (Mazzoni, p. 54).

At the same time that the states were being pressured to reform their public school systems, the federal government was relinquishing much of its educational control. The federal government's devolution movement began during the Reagan Administration. President Reagan was "ideologically committed to the devolution of education policy, and he pushed to move program and funding responsibility from the federal to state and local levels" (Mazzoni, 1994, p. 54). Concurrently, state governments had steadily been building

capacity and responding to enlarged state roles in many policy arenas (Fuhrman et al., 1988; Mazzone, 1994). Whatever combination of factors may have resulted in the shifting balance of control for public schools, it was clear that more and more of the educational policy implemented in local school districts was being developed at the state level.

Recent History of School Reform

Funding and policy responsibilities shifted to the states at about the same time that educational reforms shifted from equity to excellence. School reform in the 1980s was predominantly focused on the development of more concrete articulations of higher academic standards (Swanson & Stevenson, 2002). Since federal programs -- intended to increase equity -- were perceived as failures in increasing excellence of the nation's schools, and the political climate favored a diminished federal role in educational policy, states began to adopt policy intended to increase excellence. State educational policies began implementing policies that emphasized minimum competency standards for student performance and performance-based accountability systems (Swanson & Stevenson, 2002; Fuhrman et al., 1988). Input-driven reform policies of the past were being replaced with output-driven reform.

Since the 1980s, the trends regarding educational excellence reform have followed three "waves" of focus. The "first wave" of reform activity was dominated by rigorous curricular standards for students and teachers (Firestone & Fuhrman, 1991). A "second wave" of reform commenced in the mid 1980s, with a shift

from state prescription to more site-based management (Mazonni, 1994). The 'third wave' of school reform began in the early 1990s, and has focused more specifically on holding schools accountable for measures of student academic achievement.

School Reform and Accountability

Accountability demands have long been a part of reform movements. In the 1960s and 1970s, a spate of federal initiatives provided funds to states in exchange for compliance with federal education edicts. Most of these federal funds were tied to categorical grants designed to increase equity in education. Accountability measures – generally in the form of reporting compliance – were demanded as one of the strings attached to federal dollars.

As the direction of reform shifted, accountability concepts tied to reform have shifted in recent decades as well. Increasing the quality of public education has been equated with a renewed emphasis on “quality” as defined by quantifiable indicators of achievement. This concept of accountability reflects a belief in the “provision of more and better information about schools (i.e. statistical information) that will enable policy makers and parents to make better decisions about the education of students” (Kuchapski, 1998, p. 533).

Fuhrman (1999) outlines factors that are common in state policy as they implement educational reform policies. These factors include a focus on student performance rather than compliance with regulations, schools as the unit of improvement, school-level planning strategies around specific performance

targets, public reporting of school-level test scores, and consequences attached to performance levels. State level policies typically proceed in a predictable pattern, according to Swanson and Stevenson (2002). The first step is to establish academic content standards, they continue by determining expected levels of performance on this material, and finally implement systems of assessment aligned with these content and performance standards. States may or may not include a system of consequences – sanctions or rewards based on the schools assessed levels of achievement.

Reform using accountability concepts is based on three premises. The first premise of accountability-based reform is that “holding people accountable requires being clear about who is responsible for what” (Tucker & Clark, 1999, p. 28). The second premise is that “accountability assumes that people know the source of the problems and how to fix them” (Adams & Kirst, 1999, p. 477). The third premise on which educational accountability reform is based is that accountability’s primary purpose is to improve education (Kuchapski, 1998, Elmore, 2002). There has been much debate about the methods by which accountability is intended to improve schools and if, in fact, these methods actually do result in a higher quality education. One of the most frequently stated theories is that the reporting of assessment information will set into effect a chain of actions that will ultimately result in improved schools. In fact, several scholars have pinpointed public reporting of student achievement data as fundamental in any plan to improve schools (Fuhrman, 1999; Goetz & Duffy, 2001). Public

reporting of achievement results underlies the concept that schools belong to the public and that the citizens should “claim responsibility for and act on their problems” (Mathews, 1996, p.24).

The Policy Process

To understand how the state develops policy, it is imperative to understand the process of policymaking that the legislative body employs. Weaver and Geske (1997) summarize how approaches to legislative study have evolved over the past century. In the early 1900s, study of legislatures focused on the structure of the legislative body itself - legislative norms, rules, committee structure. This institutional research documented factors that influence legislature behavior, including the caucus and committee structure, leadership structure, and expert staff members. Around mid-century, research on legislatures began to use a behavioral approach focusing on individual legislators' behavior rather than institutional behavior of the entire body. This individual behavior research documented legislator's perceptions and responses to factors in the policymaking context. A body of research developed that examined the cues that individual legislators use in making policy decisions. These cues included fellow legislators, other key influentials, and the constituency. Beginning in the 1970s, structural and behavioral approaches became integrated in a more comprehensive model - the policy approach . This approach explores individual legislators' behavior in the context of the political and institutional environment.

In an effort to more fully understand the legislative process – and particularly to understand why legislatures make the policy decisions that they do – several strands of research have developed around many of the compounding factors. One body of research explores the role orientation of individual legislators, and attempts to answer questions about the impact of role orientation on decision making. This research can be traced back to early political theories based on Edmund Burke’s concept of representation. Do elected officials see themselves as “delegates” – mandated to make decisions based on the directives of the constituents who elected them? Or do they see themselves as “trustees” who make independent decisions based on personal judgment of what is best for the entire state? A third role orientation is the “politico” who balances the input of constituents with personal judgment to make legislative decisions (Eulau, 1962; Eulau, Wahlke, Buchanan, & Ferguson, 1973; Hickok, 1992; Jewell, 1982; Loewenberg, 1972; Weaver & Geske, 1997). Research done in the 1950s and 1960s with several state legislators also explored purposive role definition of individual legislators; is the job of legislator one of tribune, inventor, broker, ritualist, or opportunist? Differences in role orientation and definition appear to impact the approach to decision making taken by individual legislators (Eulau, 1962).

Informational sources or “cues” provided to legislators also have impact on legislative decision making. Studies of the amount of impact that information sources have on final voting behavior of legislators have found varying degrees

of impact from different sources, including legislature staff, legislative leaders, legislative “experts”, interest groups, state governmental agencies, constituents, party caucuses, governors, lobbyist, statehouse press, and policy issue networks (Rosenthal, 1998; Weaver & Geske, 1997; Wirt & Kirst, 1989).

The policy type also impacts the process of decision making. Lowi (1970) theorized that different amounts of coercion were needed to pass different types of policy bills. Distributive, or patronage, bills require the least amount of coercion. This type of bill is seen as having no losers – there is little confrontation and resources are distributed in a manner which benefits the entire state. Regulatory bills affect groups of individuals differently – often along economic sector lines. This type of bill requires more coercion, and difficult choices need to be made as to which groups win and which groups lose. The third type of bill, redistributive, is the most unstable and conflicted – and requires the highest degree of coercion. Limited funds and resources are redistributed as a result of this type of legislation, and the categories of impact on citizens are broad and sweeping. Categorization of policy initiatives by coercion type has been a subject of research for the past 30 years, and coercion type also has been shown to impact the decision making process of legislators (Weaver & Geske, 1997).

The concept of policy development has evolved from a linear concrete model to one that recognizes the complexity of multiple impacting factors. A popular early model for research over the years has been that of the “conversion

mill". Policy development in this model focuses on inputs, a decision-making event, and ultimately outputs. The legislative body receives inputs (*demands*) from various sources and converts these inputs through a decision-making process (*conversion*) to outputs (*legislative actions*) (Wahlke, 1978a; Wirt & Kirst, 1989). As appealing as the model may appear for research purposes, it neglects to recognize the complexity of the actual policy making process.

Rosenthal (1998) belies the apparent simplicity of the legislative process:

The legislative process cannot be nailed down. It is not simply one that moves from introduction to committee to the floor of one chamber and then on to the other, as diagrams of 'a bill becomes a law' depict it. It is more like a three-ring circus, with action occurring everywhere and at the same time. What one sees is not necessarily what is going on. (p. 160)

In a "conversion mill" model, policy making is seen as a process that culminates at a specific point - the decision-making moment. Decision-making is seen as a discrete event. In contrast, more contemporary models of policy development envision decision-making as an ongoing set of adjustments, midcourse corrections, and reflections. Rist (1998) offers an informative description of a contemporary model that recognizes both the complexity and contextuality of policy development. According to Rist, the policy cycle model spirals through three phases: policy formation, policy implementation, and policy accountability. Each of these phases "has its own order and logic, its own

information requirements, and its own policy actors. Further, there is only some degree of overlap among the three phases, suggesting that they do merit individual analysis and understanding" (p. 405).

Formulation of Education Policy

Nakamura and Smallwood (as cited by Rist, 1998, p. 405) define policy as "a set of instructions from policy makers to policy implementers that spell out both goals and the means for achieving those goals." The policy formulation phase occurs as sets of instructions are crafted. Exploration of the policy formulation stage focuses on how these instructions are crafted, by whom, and with what relevant policy information and analysis.

Setting The Policy Agenda

State policy makers are bombarded by multitudes of issues from a large number of arenas. In order for a particular issue to be identified for policy development, it must rise to the top of the massive pile. Wirt and Kirst (2001) define policy agenda setting as "active, serious consideration of a concrete and specific issue by state policy makers" (p.306). The earliest stages of policy formulation decide to consider an issue, and pass through four phases: issue recognition, when legislators notice an issue and believe it is of enough importance to consider; issue adoption, when legislators acknowledge it is within the domain of government responsibility; issue prioritizing so that the issue is included on the existing agenda; and issue maintenance so that the new issue remains on the agenda after initial consideration (Wirt & Kirst, 2001). The

adoption of an issue to be placed on the policy setting agenda is based on the concept of a “policy problem”. Deciding that a policy problem exists consists of identifying a problem or unmet goal within the realm of state policy and theorizing that policy intervention can fix the problem or meet the goal. Definition of the policy problem drives the rest of the policy design process, as “problems have the same status as solutions. Assumptions about ‘what’s the problem’ define choices of analytic tools and strategies for education policy and practice” (Fuhrman et al., 1988, p. 79).

In the reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, several influences have been documented that led to educational accountability finding a prominent place on the state’s policy agendas. The fact that the state reforms followed similar patterns and spread quickly through most of the nation indicates that these influences were not only intra-state, but also inter-state influences. The most significant influences on these reforms have been identified as public opinion and the media, state political environments, intragovernmental factions, and policy issue networks. These four factors were evident in the educational policy agenda prevalent among the states in the reform movements of the 1980s and 1990s.

Public opinion and the media certainly found a voice in the publicity that followed the release of A Nation at Risk and other similar reports. Public criticism of schools was spurred by the release of A Nation at Risk in 1983 by the National Commission for Educational Excellence and other similar reports citing the poor

performance of American students, especially in comparison to their peers in other nations (Swanson & Stevenson, 2002).

The political environment of the states was also influenced by national trends, most notably as mentioned earlier, the changing role of the states in determining educational policy. Not only did the dynamic change between federal and state responsibility, it also required a re-examination of the relationship between state and local authority over school governance. (Fuhrman et al., 1988). States responded uniquely to these pressures in some relationship to the history and culture of each state. Some states had traditionally rested more power with the central state department; others, such as Wyoming, Nebraska, and Iowa had a history of directing authority to local school boards (Swanson & Stevenson, 2002). In most instances, state led education reform implicitly re-addressed the question of “who is accountable to whom and for what” in determining school quality.

Though states became more active in developing educational policy – especially educational accountability policy – they were not acting in completely independent, state-specific policy environments. By the 1990s, state educational policy systems had become “enveloped and interpenetrated by national organizations and connecting networks” (Mazzoni, 1994, p. 66). These policy issue networks are defined Wirt and Kirst (2001):

A policy network is part of the large policy system and is made up of both those from the larger community outside government and

those within it with official decision-making power. Policy networks cut through various layers of government and extend networks as linked to specific issues rather than attached to general policy areas or to broad interests. The policy goals of an issue network are more specific than a political movement (p. 306).

Policy issue networks are often characterized by the kind of policy solutions that they advocate, and can be a powerful influence on early policy setting agenda activity (Wirt & Kirst, 2001). Evidence of interstate policy issue networks is seen in similar state statutes being introduced in several states' educational policy agendas. Wirt and Kirst (2001) emphasize the power of the policy issue networks' influence:

Interstate policy issue networks can frequently override political and socioeconomic constraints for state agenda setting. On the whole, network effectiveness – rather than fiscal capacity, legislative capacity, or state policy centralization – accounts for certain issues on a state policy agenda (p. 306).

Influence of policy issue networks on state education legislation had evolved by the 1990s to a point that there was “a web of these coalitions and advocacy groups....ubiquitous in shaping public policy” (Kaplan & Usdan, 1992, p. 666).

A relatively new development in educational policy was the influence of the business community in the education policy issues networks. Fuhrman et al.

(1988) affirm that “business interests predominated in most of the states, in comparison to past years when businesspeople showed little interest in education policy except to stop tax increases” (p. 66). Several scholars attribute the increased interest of the business community in educational policy to their perception that American schools were not preparing a workplace that would remain competent in a global economy (Morrow, 2001). This pressure from the business community helped to shape the reform direction toward ‘excellence in education’ and to create policy solutions based on standards. Morrow states that:

The push for standards began in force back in September 1989, when President George Bush called the nation’s governors together for the first-ever National Education Summit. ... American business endorsed standards as the essential building block of school reform, a necessary step if America was to remain economically competitive. (p. 8)

While business interests were a notable addition to the policy issue networks in recent decades, the influence of some traditional players – the professional educational associations – were notably decreased. According to Fuhrman et al. (1988), the academic excellence reform movement did not originate in the education community. Instead, representatives of state level education associations complained that the “reforms were ‘done to’ them and defined them as part of the problem rather than the solution” (p. 203).

Educational associations played a secondary rather than a leading role in this wave of reform. Fuhrman et al. further claim that educators'

influence prior to reform passage was limited, in part because of the ascent of other groups, especially business. Although not strong supporters of reform, they also did not wage all-out opposition for the most part. In some states, their strategy was to voice opposition privately to policymakers but to take no position or a mildly supportive stance in public. (p. 205)

Implementation of Educational Policy

During the policy implementation phase, policy initiatives and goals are translated into programs, procedures, and regulations. Wise (1979) describes an educational policy as containing "two elements – an aim to be achieved and a 'theory of education' or set of hypotheses that explain how to achieve that aim" (p. 51). In order to design policy that can be implemented, policy makers need to define the policy problem in a way that will lead to an appropriate policy instrument to fix that problem. Framing the problem for state educational reform policy required, as stated earlier, a belief in the premise that "accountability assumes that people know the source of the problems and how to fix them" (Adams & Kirst, 1999, p. 477).

When the concept of educational accountability surfaced on the policy agenda screen, several factions pointed to and debated the problems they perceived with school achievement. By undertaking this issue as a policy issue,

policy makers implicitly assumed responsibility for defining the problem and for designing policy solutions. The fact that this occurred for the most part without the input of the educational community indicates a “top-down” policy design approach. This is one perspective on the question of ‘who governs’ and has described policy makers as those who “interpret the problem, define the solution, and have the resources and political power to move an idea into the works of action” (Liggett & Johnston, 1997, p. 20). In other words, knowledge and power flow from the top; policy makers are the fixers and planners, school personnel are the “doers” – public servants who carry out the policy (Liggett & Johnston, 1997).

Research on the effectiveness of implementation shows mixed results from policy that is designed from a top down perspective. In one classic study of policy implementation reviewed over a ten year period, Cohen and Hill (2001) showed that implementation of top down policy did occur, but success was present only when implementers had significant opportunities to learn, and when mutual adaptations between policy makers and “street level” bureaucrats were supported. Cohen and Hill found that teachers are more accurately thought of as “policy brokers” and not educational clerks; teachers are “active players who judge and use policy, and make policy as they respond to others’ initiatives” (p.85).

Policy design also indicates the solutions that policy makers envision. As Pressman and Wildavsky state, “Policies imply theories. Whether stated

explicitly or not, policies point to the chain of causation between initial conditions and future consequences” (p. xv). A theory of action underlying a policy solution outlines the “chain of objectives” that are intended to eventually achieve “accomplishment of the ultimate outcomes” (Patton, 1978, as cited by Malen et al., 2002, p. 114). Whether or not the theory of action is articulated, or even logical, the fact that policy is designed to solve a problem indicates the presence of a theory of action. As Malen et al. phrase it, “while these theories of action may be incomplete, untested, or even contradictory, they constitute a framework that individuals use to guide, interpret or justify their actions” (p. 113).

The concept of a theory of action is founded on the belief that the ends are known at the beginning, and the logic of reaching those ends is clear (Wildavsky, 1979). Theories of action for educational accountability policy are often implied rather than specified. It is helpful to examine the assumptions framing the theory of action in order to determine whether or not a policy has potential for meeting its objectives. If the theory is based on inaccurate or unfounded assumptions, the policy will not work as designed (Bardach, 1977). Criticism of educational accountability policies has been leveled on the basis of unfounded assumptions and/or a lack of an explicit theory of action. Elmore (2002) states that in order to be effective, state educational accountability systems “needed a specific working theory of how the accountability system is supposed to produce improvement in student learning. No accountability system currently has such a working theory” (p. 22).

The policy problem, the policy intent, and the theory of action for policy solution can all be articulated with varying degrees of specificity. The form in which a policy is written – the type and style of legislation – can also be a factor in determining whether or not a policy is effective in addressing the policy problem as intended. A law that is written in broad and vague terms is open to more interpretation – and misinterpretation—than a specific and tightly written law. Cibulka refers to Lowi (1970) claiming the need for greater rationality in law making by arguing that implementation breakdown results from ambiguities and contradictions in the laws themselves. Being overly specific can also impede a policy's effectiveness, according to Van Horn and Van Meter, by limiting flexibility and adaptations to variation in contexts: "The more specific the language of the requirement, the greater the danger that the limitations to compel performance will be revealed" (1976, p. 112).

Accountability of Educational Policy

The policy accountability phase comes when the "policy or program is sufficiently mature that one can address questions of accountability" (Rist, 1998, p. 413). Assessing the effectiveness and the consequences of policy and program initiatives becomes the focus of exploration at this phase. Majone and Wildavsky (1977) state that "As problems are truly understood only after they have been solved, so the full implication of an idea can often be seen only from hindsight" (p. 109). Often times, problems in policy design become apparent after implementation is begun.

In order to expect effective policy implementation, policy must take into account a theory of action that is valid, as well as other constraints that may impact implementation (Majone & Wildavsky, 1977). One of the aspects of policy design affecting effectiveness in policy solution is the feasibility of implementation, as Elmore (1980) writes, "if administrative feasibility is not discussed and accommodated in the policy then the complexity of implementation will almost certainly overwhelm the intent of policy" (p. 3). One of the criticisms of state education accountability policies has been that many states are developing policy "rushing to hold students and schools accountable for results without providing the essential support " (Quality Counts, 2001, p. 8, as cited by Merrow, 2001).

Changes in systems as complex as schools is not accomplished simply or quickly. In order to effectively change institutions, adequate support must be given for the change process. As Liggett and Johnston (1997) declare, "Funding and allocation of resources are obvious linchpins of policy implementation. If there is any possibility of achieving policy goals and objectives, a roughly determined bare threshold of funding is necessary" (p.19). Sirotnik (2002) makes a valid point as well as he claims that the policy makers and the public both have the right to demand accountability, but also the responsibility to provide the necessary resources to "truly leave no child behind." He writes:

Government and the public have a right to know how well children are faring in our public education systems.... Those responsible for

educating our children, therefore, must be called into account by parents, communities, the state, and perhaps even the nation – assuming these constituent groups are willing to fund appropriate and responsible educational practices. (p. 667)

In addition to designing coherent policy and supporting that policy with necessary resources, policy makers need to consider the impact of their policy on the “equity and excellence in teaching and learning” (Sirotnik, 2002, p. 671). Consequences of standards based reform may include a narrowing of the curriculum, and the encouragement of undesirable practices in schools in an effort to meet expected performance levels (Davie & Silva, 1999; Merrow, 2001; Hill, 2001; Tucker & Clark, 1999). Policy makers need to be accountable for the negative impacts of policy as well as the efficiency of policy solutions.

Politics and Policy Making

Wirt and Kirst (1989) report that historically, “an unspoken and longstanding agreement among American citizens and scholars... that the world of education is and should be separate from the world of politics” (p.2). If that myth ever truly existed, it certainly hasn’t since the educational reforms and policy activity of the 1980s and 1990s. Particularly in addressing the issue of student achievement, “the problem of who is actually responsible for student failure has become deeply politicized” (Elmore, 2002, p. 9). Policy makers make decisions about policy for a multitude of reasons. Some of those reasons are explicit and open for public debate, but some are based on rationales not publicly

addressed. As a former Maryland senator stated, "Behind every successful open meeting, there's a closed meeting somewhere" (Rosenthal, 1998, p. 156).

Many scholars have claimed that educational policies may have intents other than school improvement. Fuhrman et al. (1988) described policy makers as being very aware that standards were "sometimes proxies for distrust of local districts, concealed goads towards consolidation, or sops to business supporters" (p. 215). While it is not surprising that policy makers – who are after all politicians – use policy for political goals, it needs to be evaluated in terms of the impact such political activity has on its constituency. Smith and O'Day (1990) claim that one of the biggest deterrents to improved schools in the nation are the "conflicting and politically motivated squabbles at the state level among the variety of agencies and within the state legislature alone there are often two, three, or even more such agendas" (p. 257).

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach was used to conduct this study. This choice of methodology was based on my conceptualization of the research and the nature of the research topic. My conceptualization of this research was based on "naturalistic inquiry" approach as described by Guba and Lincoln (1998) and others (Glesne, 1999; Schwandt, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A naturalistic inquiry approach deals with meanings that individuals construct through experience, interaction, and perception. The goal of naturalistic inquiry is the understanding and reconstruction of meaning held by both participants and inquirer (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Glesne, 1999).

The naturalistic inquiry approach is a good fit for the complexity of the research topic. Rist (1998) declares that "policy making is multidimensional and multifaceted" (p. 402). In order to begin to paint a composite picture of the process, one must explore individual perspectives. Wahlke (1978b) expresses this point regarding legislators and understanding legislative action:

Any conception of a legislative picture is to begin as a collection of individuals engaging in various actions. No theory or explanation of why a legislature does what it does, therefore, can altogether dispense with a conception of why individuals do what they do. (p. 23)

Policy formation is also strongly influenced by context (Fuhrman et al., 1988), impacted by factors of time, local tradition, and political climate.

The use of naturalistic inquiry allowed for consideration of both the individual perspectives of policy makers as well as the context in which the policy development occurred (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Rist, 1998; Smith, 1983).

Research Design

Qualitative research, by its very nature, defies a step by step procedure (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997; Glesne, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Meloy, 1994). The design for this study was not tightly planned, but allowed to emerge as the study progressed. A general outline for the study's design included the research questions and plans for selection of site and participants, data collection, and data analysis.

Selection of Site and Participants

'Site' in this project can be conceptualized in multiple ways. Most simply--and geographically--the site is the state of Iowa. More narrowly, yet less concretely, the site can be thought of as the various activities and components of the policy design process that eventually resulted in the passage of Iowa House File 2272. Accordingly, most of the research focused on past and present events that have connection to the Iowa Statehouse in Des Moines. A major site for the research was the State Capitol, but data collection was not limited to that location.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling techniques, identifying the individuals considered to be knowledgeable and reflective

regarding this particular piece of legislation. Purposive sampling is used with the goal of selecting participants who are *information rich* (Morse, 1998). Morse suggests that "one selects participants who are experiential experts...[or] are authorities about a particular experience" (Morse, p. 73). To this end, I assembled a preliminary list of potential participants who might have key information on the policy development of HF 2272. The majority of individuals on this list were selected because of their positions as state legislators. The list included all legislators that served on the education committees in the Iowa House of Representatives and the Iowa Senate during the 1998 session, the year that the accountability legislation was passed. The list also included individuals selected because of professional role connections to state educational policy --legislative staff members, executive policy advisors, and Iowa Department of Education personnel. All of the information necessary for compiling this list was a matter of public record.

Using the list as a starting point, I began the process of honing the names to identify those who would be able to provide insight into development of HF 2272. Odendahl and Shaw (2002) advise that "those who have contacts with members of groups tend to be the best sources of information on power and influence within their own sphere" (p. 306). Accordingly, I started with a convenient insider - a member of the Iowa State House of Representatives who is also my spouse. I asked him to preview the list and to give me some indication of those he would ask if he wanted more information on HF 2272 specifically, or

on state education policy in general. He identified several names as knowledgeable--those individuals that he and others sought for information on educational matters. To gain further input on those considered knowledgeable, I used several opportunities at political and professional gatherings to engage in informal conversations. Many people with access to state level policy makers were at these events, and I asked them for suggestions of individuals who would be knowledgeable about state educational legislature and policy. These network contacts provided several of the same names that my husband had suggested, as well as some additional names. I also contacted acquaintances from professional organizations and asked for suggestions. I used the information from these informal methods to target a smaller group of individuals as potential participants in the study. Additionally, as I gathered data from the interview process, I asked each participant for suggestions of other knowledgeable policy makers they would recommend as participants in the study. As the data collection continued, the names on this list were modified slightly based on input from the interviews. Glesne (1999) refers to this emerging participant sampling as "snowballing" which is accomplished by "obtaining information about potential participants from people who know people who meet the research interests" (p. 29). This process helped to identify critical knowledge elite that may have been omitted from the original list (Janesick, 1998).

Access and Entry to the Site

The participants in this study were drawn from an elite group. The term "elite", as described by Odendahl and Shaw (2002), is related to relative power, position, and privilege. Gaining access to elite groups can pose unique hurdles for researchers (Punch, 1998; Glesne, 1999; Odendahl & Shaw). In order to facilitate access to potential participants, I employed several strategies. One strategy suggested in the research literature is the use of an 'insider' in gaining access to elite groups (Glesne, 1999; Odendahl, 2002). My insider offered insight regarding the culture at the Capitol, which proved helpful in eliciting participation in the project. Additionally, being able to accompany him to various events -- as well as onto the floor of the Capitol chambers -- offered numerous opportunities for networking and gaining access.

Gaining permission to interview an elite participant "typically requires extensive preparation, homework, and creativity on the part of the researchers as well as the right credentials and contacts" (Odendahl & Shaw, p. 307). Approaches to gaining permission for interviews from potential participants for this project were varied. Informal conversations led to permission to interview a number of participants. With other participants in this study, a more formal approach was used. In all situations, efforts were made to present the participant with enough information so that an interview could be held with some degree of pre-established trust and credibility. An introductory "lay summary" was prepared along the guidelines offered by Glesne (1999). This summary included a brief

explanation of the research and an invitation to participate. For some participants, this presentation was offered verbally. For other participants, a more formal written summary was sent in advance of an attempt to gain an interview.

Gaining permission to interview was not problematic in most cases. Scheduling interviews was a much more challenging task. It was this challenge that required the aforementioned creativity, flexibility, and luck. A number of participants maintain fairly predictable, yet very full, schedules. These participants were more likely to be those who hold roles as staff members, education advisors, and Department of Education personnel. The challenge in scheduling interviews with these participants was in finding a time that was compatible with their schedules and preferences. The majority of those in the participant pool, the legislators, however, experience a highly unpredictable schedule -- especially during the legislative session. Scheduling interviews became rather unpredictable as well. Re-scheduling at the last minute was the norm rather than the exception in arranging interviews with legislators. One successful strategy was to "log time" (Odendahl & Shaw, 2002) at the Capitol. I spent one week there from early morning until evening, being available for impromptu interviews whenever legislators found time during the course of the daily session. Other strategies included scheduling an interview early in the day (before legislators gavel in), trying to arrange a lunchtime meeting, or attempting

to schedule interviews either during the day or at the end of the day. These strategies were all employed with varying degrees of success.

Data Collection

This study sought to gain understanding of state policymakers' perceptions. Face-to-face interviews served as the primary data collection method, based on the concept that human interactions and the meanings that individuals ascribe to experiences form the central source of information in inquiry (Berg, 1995). I used a semistandardized interview process, which could be described as 'directed conversations' (Charmez, 2002). An interview protocol formed the base for the interview, but was not rigid or inflexible. Internalizing the aims of the research, as well as the key interview questions, allowed me the latitude of pursuing ideas and issues more open-endedly as they emerged during the course of the interviews. Additionally, the interview protocol itself evolved slightly throughout the course of the research project, as data was analyzed and tentative themes began to appear.

Toward the end of each interview session, I attempted to summarize and reiterate key ideas to verify my understanding of participants' responses. Twenty-four of the twenty-six interviews were audiotaped. One of the interviews was held face-to-face, but the participant preferred not to be audiotaped. One interview was conducted with a combination of phone and e-mail connections – this interview, also, was not audiotaped. Additionally, field notes were written during and after each of the twenty-six interviews, in order to record my

perceptions of the interaction. Each of the audiotaped interviews was transcribed verbatim shortly after the interview session.

In order to fine-tune the preliminary interview protocol and process, I developed a tentative protocol. I field-tested the interview process with three individuals - a state representative, a state senator, and a house caucus staff member. Before these trial interviews, I explained the purpose of the trial interviews as both to gather information AND to elicit their feedback on the questions/interview process. The first participant (my 'insider' spouse) had several suggestions, and we engaged in a lengthy conversation about possibilities for questioning strategies that would encourage more meaningful response. The second participant, the state senator, made a few suggestions. By the time a third field interview was conducted, the interview protocol was close to its current form (Appendix B).

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) advise that "no single method can grasp the subtle variation in ongoing human experience" (p.24). Data were also collected through inspection of relevant documents including previous bill drafts, commission reports, press releases, the House Journal, Senate Journal, Iowa Code, Administrative Rules, and Department of Education publications. Some of these documents were suggested by interview participants; a few were voluntarily provided to me by participants. Other documents were secured through research at the Capitol library, as well as through other research institutions. Although the interview process proved to yield the richest data, I

agree with Berg's (1995) point that each method of data collection can complement and enrich the data as "a different line of sight directed toward the same point, observing social and symbolic reality" (p. 4).

Agreements with Participants

Lincoln and Guba (1985) wrote that "meaningful human research is impossible without the full understanding and cooperation of the respondents" (p. 105). Ethical research guidelines were followed in an attempt to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants. A proposal for the study was submitted to the Human Subject Research Review committee at Drake University. The proposal was reviewed and approved by that committee. All participants were informed about the nature and purpose of the study. This was accomplished by an introductory "lay summary" (see Glesne, 1999) presented in person, through the mail, or by telephone conversation. At the beginning of each interview, the participants were again reminded about the nature and purpose of the study. They were asked to read and sign an Interviewee Consent Form (Appendix C). This form makes the assurance that participation was voluntary and that each participant was free to withdraw at any time. A few minutes at the beginning of each interview was spent obtaining permission to tape record, and checking for any questions or concerns that the participant may have had.

Participants were informed that the findings of the study would be made public but that names of participants would not be used. I attempted to report findings in ways would not reveal any identifying information about individual

participants. This poses more of a challenge in an elite group of participants. Punch (1998) noted that "many public figures are almost impossible to disguise, and if they cooperate in research, may have to accept a considerable measure of exposure" (p.176). Nevertheless, as Punch advises, every safeguard has been attempted so that participants do not suffer harm or embarrassment as a consequence of the research. One such safeguard has been to use the pronouns he/she in alternate order when referring to participants in the study, rather than referring to the actual gender of the participant being quoted.

At the end of each interview session, participants were asked if they would be willing and available for follow-up interviews. Participants are also assured that they will receive, if desired, a copy of the report summary upon its conclusion.

Data Analysis

The process of analysis involves "working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p.145). My goal was to remain "close to the data", by simultaneously collecting and analyzing data. The process of analysis of this study thus began with the earliest stages of data collection. Huberman and Miles (1998) stress the importance of effective data management – that is, a "systematic; coherent process of data collection, storage and retrieval" (p. 180). I approached the data analysis processes using constant comparative method, described by Goetz and

LeCompte (1981) as "a strategy combin[ing] inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all social incidents observed...As events are constantly compared with previous events, new typological dimension, as well as new relationships, may be discovered" (p. 58). The events analyzed in this study were the responses of participants in the interview process, as well as meaning derived from field notes and document analysis. Data analysis includes the subprocesses of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Huberman & Miles, 1998, p. 180). The follow paragraphs describe the steps I took to analyze the data using these subprocesses.

As the first interviews were completed, they were transcribed verbatim and reviewed for accuracy. At this point, I assigned a letter and number to signify each participant. I also assigned the corresponding letter and number to the field notes written after each interview. As I read each transcription, I wrote notes in the margins to reflect initial impressions or questions that arose. After several transcriptions were reviewed, I inspected again the interview protocol. While the major questions on the protocol were not changed significantly, some of the patterns from the initial interviews allowed for more meaningful follow-up probes or questions to be added to the protocol. This procedure was repeated several times during the data gathering and analysis process. Eventually, this process also led me to detect a sense of "saturation of information" -- an event in data collection and analysis that Seidman (1991) defines as "a point in a study at which the interviewer begins to hear the same information reported... the

interviewer may recognize that he or she is not learning anything decidedly new" (p.45). While I still felt intrigued by the participant's responses at this point in series of interviews, a sense of "saturation" led me to feel confident that the number of interviews conducted was sufficient enough to be credible.

As I inspected the transcribed interviews, the notes I jotted in the margins were used to develop an initial coding schema. As I reviewed these transcriptions and margin notes, I looked for common ideas and connections. I used these as ideas as a first set of categories for roughly sorting the data. Next, I took each response from the interview transcriptions and broke them into individual units of meaning. I used a "unitizing" concept as suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1998) by dividing the responses into the "smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself; that is, it must be interpretable in the absence of any additional information other than a broad understanding on the context in which the inquiry is carried out" (p. 345). I also read through collected documents at this time, and made notes about these. I used a similar process to break these into units of meaning.

Next, I entered each of these units into a data base program. I took each unit and entered it into a field of the data base program, with a corresponding field identifying the participant by number and letter. I again read through each unit and placed a word a word or phrase in a field next to the statement to answer the questions, "What is the participant telling me?" or "What does this response mean?"

The next portion of the analysis process focused on looking for the categories and connections that arose out of the initial coding. I added another field to the data base, and categorized each unit according to these initial codes. As I found patterns of meaning, I sorted and grouped these data units together and looked for connections. Using these connections, I arrived at a revised set of categories under which the initial codings could be grouped. I then reviewed all the pieces of data again, and assigned tentative categories based on the revised set. Using the data base program, I grouped all the like categories and looked for themes within and across these categories. Eventually, these themes began to take more definite shape and were subsequently written into the initial findings.

Although this process of data analysis has been described as a chronological series of steps, the process was more cyclic than linear. Adhering to a concept of constant comparison involved re-reading codes and themes, comparing new pieces of meaning with previous pieces of meaning, contrasting alternate meaning, refining themes, and continually trying out connections in different arrangements (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These processes were repeated until I felt satisfied that I had exhaustively saturated all categorization and relevant meaning sets from the data.

Trustworthiness of the Research

Denzin and Lincoln (1999) wrote that "triangulation is not a tool or strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation" (p. 4). One method frequently

employed in qualitative research to bolster the trustworthiness of the research is triangulation. Glesne (1999) defined triangulation as the practice of relying on multiple data collection methods (p. 31). The purpose for this type of triangulation is not "the simple combination of different kinds of data, but the attempt to relate them so as to counteract the threats to validity identified in each" (Berg, 1995, p. 5). For this study, trustworthiness was enhanced through the use of multiple methods of data-collection. Though the primary data collection method was semistandardized interviews, relevant documents were also analyzed. In addition, divergent policy makers were included as participants. Legislators from both political parties and from both chambers, staff members, state level Department of Education personnel, and executive advisors all participated in the interviews.

Trustworthiness was also addressed by member checking and by peer review (Creswell, 1998). Member checking was accomplished by sharing analytical thoughts and drafts of the research with a few participants to ascertain whether their ideas were clear and resonated with their perceptions. Throughout the dissertation process, I had the opportunity to elicit peer review of the project with other graduate students as well as my Dissertation Advisory Committee. Additionally, this study was one of seven studies initiated by a grant from the FINE Foundation to explore the policy process in the development and implementation of HF 2272. All of the researchers involved in these studies met on a regular basis to discuss and review each other's preliminary findings. In an

additional attempt to increase trustworthiness, I maintained an audit trail including field notes, tape recordings, transcriptions, documents, analytical coding schemes, and any other data generated in the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The meaning derived from this study reflects an interactive construction between participants, other sources of information, and the researcher. Being cognizant of my own subjectivity was critical to the trustworthiness of the research. My personal biases were no doubt reflected in the design of the project as well as in the interpretive analysis. As mentioned earlier, Glesne (1999) declares that subjectivity can be monitored for more trustworthy research. While I believe that it was impossible to completely negate my perspective, continual efforts were made to remain mindful of my own subjectivity and to remain "close to the data" while deriving meaning from this study.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

House File 2272, to the casual observer, seemed to appear out of nowhere. The bill was introduced quietly, discussed and debated very minimally, and quickly passed unanimously through both chambers of the Iowa Legislature in April of 1998. Many of those intimately involved with policymaking regarded the bill with little interest and seemed to feel that its implementation would do little to change the ways schools operate in Iowa. As one policy advisor stated, "During the time that it emerged, we kind of overlooked that bill. It's fairly innocuous, it's not very long, and it sounded pretty general. And suddenly it popped on the radar screen." It wasn't until the bill had proceeded through the rules review process that a critical impact on local school districts seemed apparent. The findings reported from this study attempt to add to the understanding of factors leading to the introduction of this bill, and what policymakers perceived the implementation of this bill would accomplish.

Factors Leading to the Introduction Of HF2272

The Political Climate

"It was a confluence of several factors. ...It's an increasing national interest in education – that's one of them; it's also an interest in a stronger results orientation in government" – Department of Education Official.

According to many of the participants in this study, the time was ripe for passing educational accountability legislation in Iowa. Many of those interviewed recalled that the political climate throughout the nation in the 1980s and 1990s was characterized by two significant trends. One of those trends was an increased emphasis on accountability for government-sponsored programs. The other trend mentioned -- probably not unrelated to the first -- was a heightened national awareness and interest in the 'business' of American schools. These two national movements converged at a time that set the stage for formulation of educational accountability legislation in the late 1990s. The following paragraphs provide further detail about policymakers' perceptions of these two trends as they impacted the policy environment in the 1980s and 1990s in Iowa.

Accountability

"Now everybody went through this accountability phase -- oh let's be accountable!" -- Legislator

The concept of accountability -- not surprisingly--was often cited as a central factor leading to the introduction of HF 2272. As one participant stated, "I think it happened because of a general raising of people's beliefs about accountability in general." Many expressed a belief that accountability conversations in Iowa had increased in recent decades, fueled by the national movements. One state department official voiced her perceptions of the trend, "Although our accountability law doesn't mirror the national movement, there

were conversations that said the national movement is talking about accountability, what does that look like in Iowa?"

Though many cited accountability as a critical factor leading to the introduction of HF2272, participants often referred to differing aspects of the concept of accountability. Some referred to the "public's right to know," focusing on accountability as a type of openness – a reporting out of information to the public. Others alluded to increased accountability as a tighter handle on standardization and explicit measurements. Many spoke of accountability in a fiscal sense, referring to justification for tax dollars spent.

Communication as accountability. Some participants referred to accountability as a form of communication; most voiced the communication aspect of accountability as part of an overall philosophy of governments' duty to be open with the public. A need for a greater sense of accountability – as established by more explicit communication -- was seen by many. "You know, this idea of accountability, this really was about getting information out there, to make schools more accountable so the public knows." The sense that schools had not been open about achievement results was voiced by several, some remarked the perception was that schools acted as if they had something to hide. One legislator stated, "I think it was a mistrust. I would say it was kind of a paranoia about schools that they were trying to hide some bad stuff." When asked about an enhanced level of accountability, another legislator stated her perceptions this way, "The public deserved that. There was a big plea that the

public's right to know is involved in that. They should know how their schools are measuring up and whether they are accomplishing what they set out to do."

Standardization as accountability. Another aspect of accountability that surfaced in policymakers' perceptions was the amount of standardization imposed over local entities by the state. There was the perception that any reporting being done by schools was "loose." In order to increase accountability, measurements and results need to be reported in ways that are consistent – prescribed – and comparable. One policy influential likened this concept of accountability to the trend of 'businessizing' government programs being discussed at national governors' summits: "One of the things that they were trying to do was apply some of the principles that businesses were talking about in terms of standards and accountability. How do you know as a business if you are doing well in that industry sector if you don't measure yourself against someone else who's doing well in that industry?"

Fiscal accountability. The component of accountability that was most frequently discussed, however, was a sense of 'fiscal' accountability. In order to justify the expenditure of tax dollars, there must be some sort of measurable results reported back to the taxpayers. One legislator voiced her perception about the political climate at the time this bill was being discussed: "A lot of the discussion on the Education Committee was whether or not we had ways of justifying either money that was being put into education or other programs." Several participants made remarks about the proportion of tax dollars that are

spent on education. The idea that schools have been allowed to use large amounts of public funding was often coupled with the perception that schools have had little expectation placed upon them for reporting the results of those expenditures. Increased accountability means increased rationalization – in terms of quantifiable results -- for moneys spent. Most of these remarks were neutral musings, wondering how policymakers might answer questions about accountability for tax dollars spent, as evidenced by the statement made by one legislator: "If we're going to be spending all this money on education, we have an obligation. We want to show the local taxpayers that the students are achieving." Another participant remarked, "What can we do to assure our taxpayers that our money is being well spent, that our schools are doing a good job? So I think it's some accountability back to the taxpayers because we are asking people to keep paying taxes."

Another viewpoint – though one that was mentioned with less frequency – voiced a less neutral stance, stating that schools are perceived by many as claiming special status; acting as if accountability expectations did not apply to schools. "I heard something last night, somebody commented that K-12 staff people are spoiled. They scoop the money and everybody else gets what's left over. I think there is a general attitude that K-12 schools, K-12 staff see themselves as special."

National Interest in Education

"I think that nationwide, there was more interest in how our schools are doing and why." – Legislator

When reflecting on the factors that led to the introduction of HF 2272, many policymakers recalled that education had been more prominent on the political agenda in the 1980s and 1990s than in the past. Some of the participants cited specific events that helped to launch this national interest: "If you look back at the policy environment at the that time, we had a series of events in the 90's that were America 2000 or Goals 2000. It didn't matter what party was in power at the federal level." A policy advisor echoed this perception of an increased focus on education: "There was from the early 1990s all the way through to the Goals 2000. We had two education summits in the 90's, and then there was another one."

Some saw the national trend as reflecting more partisan political philosophies. A policy advisor mentioned the influence of both national parties emphasizing educational issues. She stated, "But I do think that there's been some national agendas in both parties that were influenced by other states more than Iowa, like this is the sort of issue we're looking at and if you do this, we'll give you a gold star." Several participants mentioned the Republican Party as instrumental in formulating a policy that spread throughout the states; eventually that agenda became instrumental in the Iowa political environment. This is perhaps how the two movements – enhanced accountability demands and

increased interest in education – became related. One policy advisor listed national factors she saw as significant in the development of Iowa educational policy, one of which was “the national politics that were going on at the time. Clearly, there was a Republican agenda, the accountability issue nationally is significantly higher than it is in Iowa.” Another policy influential linked accountability to schools in this political agenda. This state senator stated, “I suppose it’s all part of that right-wing agenda. It is. They have certain things they want to do, more accountability in the schools and all these ... things. They have this litany of things and they’re doing it in every state.”

Federal Legislation

National movements towards tighter accountability and enhanced interest in educational results converged explicitly in federal legislation in 1994 with the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). A consistent finding that emerged throughout this study was the idea that HF 2272 was in some way a response to the requirements outlined in this federal legislation. Some participants felt that HF 2272 was directly tied to a compromise with the federal government to comply with ESEA requirements. Others felt that the introduction of HF 2272 was not merely a compliance reaction, but in part, to pressures placed on Iowa to conform – to be more like its neighbors – because everyone else is doing it, and “we sort of seemed to be out of synch.” One legislator mused, “There was pressure from outside forces, outside of the state, stating that Iowa is almost a rogue state... I think there was

an expectation that Iowa needed to do something because we were the only hold-out state.” Though the perception varied as to the exact connection, it was evident that most participants felt that the 1994 Re-authorization of the ESEA was indeed a strong contributing factor leading to the introduction of HF 2272 in Iowa.

Iowa's Wake Up Call

“We were starting to see some signals that things weren't going so well.”—Policy Advisor

As stated earlier, many of the participants in this study would probably agree that the time was ripe for educational accountability. The national trends toward increased accountability and enhanced interest in education, together with the event of the re-authorization of ESEA, readied the policy soil for planting legislation like HF 2272. But what about local factors? Were there specific factors in Iowa that precipitated this bill? Participants in this study most often pointed to the perception that Iowa's status as the premier education state was in danger of being threatened. Many of the participants expressed – either explicitly or implicitly – how important it is to Iowa to be regarded as the education state. “We've always said Iowa's number one in education,” and “we had taken great pride in always being number one in ACT and SAT, you name it.”; these comments represent the flavor of remarks made by the majority of participants. One policy advisor worded his perception in a way that revealed just how critical this reputation is to many Iowans: “We do an excellent job in

educating the children in this state, in the districts that we have. That's always been our hallmark, our selling point – that we've got good schools."

Perceptions began to emerge that the status of Iowa's schools was beginning to slip in the 1990s. For some participants, the perception seemed vague and based on some mistrust of the school establishment, as noted by one state representative -- "I think there were feelings from people that weren't in the education system, like a lot of us are, that things are getting worse and that schools were actually hiding that information." Other perceptions seemed to be based on generalized observations. One legislator noted, "It came because, for the first time, student achievement was declining and it had been declining for a number of years and nothing seemed to be turning the tide." Another stated, "What the department of education was sharing as student achievement showed a downward trend. I think that was coinciding with national concern about the performance of our education system." Another legislator echoed this sentiment with the suggestion of a possible source for the perception that the quality of Iowa schools is in a state of decline: "There is so much publicity that comes out every year about what's wrong with education. ... It's hard to ignore all the reports that keep coming forward and what you hear from other states about the problems with education and our kids not performing well in the competitive global arena and all these things, that I think its only natural for people to be concerned."

Other participants stated specific data that had been changing. This same data had previously been used to substantiate Iowa's claim to "Number One" status -- "There've been some definite concerns over the last well probably the last six to seven years maybe even ten years over the gradual decrease in the statewide test scores in reading math and science. An overall decline." These perceptions were shared by many of the participants, evidenced by comments about test scores: "Test scores were falling. Reading scores, supposedly were falling in a lot of categories, ACT scores were dropping." One policy advisor linked the policymakers' response to the data they were receiving about the status of Iowa schools, stating that "I think the legislature got a little panicky when some of the scores started declining for a couple years there." These concrete measures sounded alarms that had previously been unheard of in Iowa.

The Origin of HF 2272

There were many perspectives about the conditions that led to the introduction of HF 2272, and most participants felt that these conditions were a confluence of a number of factors. Interestingly, there were widely diverse opinions about the origination of the idea for this particular form of legislation.

Several participants felt that the language and form of this bill came from sources outside of the state of Iowa. Given the national movement towards standards and accountability, and the requirements of federal legislation, this is not surprising. One legislator suggested that it probably originated through an issues network, and that previous versions had been introduced before HF2272:

We started in 1994. That was the first time that we actually had any legislation dealing with it. As far as the origin, I know that some other states were working on it and people that came back from a conference talked about it and initiated it and tried to get legislation passed. They had built a committee to deal with certain components of it but then nothing happened. Went to the deadlines and didn't make it, and then 1998 was really the first year where something was passed.

Other participants agreed that the idea for HF 2272 probably came from discussions occurring through networks and that similar bills were being discussed in other states. Many participants felt that the form of HF 2272 came through these networks and was introduced in Iowa through legislative initiative. Some of those interviewed recalled specific legislators that first brought forth the idea. A legislator commented that she recalled, "I think it was House Republicans who were really behind the bill. I think it was Representative X that started the bill, I remember it, it was a big deal as a policy piece." One legislator credited that same representative with bringing the idea to the house, but clarified "the idea, just in and of itself, wouldn't have originated with Representative X, but it'd been tossed around a long time." A policy advisor recalled, "Representative Y wrote and introduced an earlier version of this bill; I know that he was integral in getting this other earlier version out there." Several other participants agreed with another legislator who stated, "It was pretty much a legislative initiative."

Others who were interviewed did not feel that HF 2272 was a legislative initiative. Several participants felt that the idea for this bill came from the Iowa Department of Education. A policy advisor was explicit in her perspective, "The department requested this bill". Others agreed as another policy advisor stated, "I think this came from the department."

Other participants admitted they were unsure exactly where the bill originated, but they shared their perspectives. One legislator felt it may have come from more than one place, but was sure that, "it didn't come from the schools, I can tell you that much. It came from the legislature as far as I could tell. I don't know what involvement the Department of Education had in it, but I don't think as much as the legislature." Another legislator agreed that the idea may have come from more than one source, stating, "I'm not sure where it came from, I believe that it probably came from several different sources coming from the perception of need for something like this." One legislator commented on the discussions and interaction between the legislature and the Department of Education regarding different components of the bill, remarking that "DE wasn't pushing that piece (reporting to communities) very far. They were doing more of the reporting and the planning, they weren't doing the report to the local communities, that wasn't theirs; that was ours."

What Legislators Hoped to Accomplish with HF 2272

When asked to recall the intent of this legislation, participants' responses generally fell into three categories. Most participants felt that the goals the

legislators hope to accomplish with HF 2272 were to comply with federal legislation; to improve schools in Iowa; and/or to gain political position.

Compliance with Federal Legislation

"My understanding was it was really driven by the federal government – that doesn't mean we didn't think it wasn't a good idea, it doesn't mean we didn't think we should have more accountability." – Department of Education Official

The federal requirements outlined in the reauthorization of ESEA were a major influence in the origin of this bill according to most of those interviewed. The original intent of HF 2272 was to craft a compromise solution that would allow for compliance with federal legislation as well as maintain Iowa's position on local control. One state department official voiced his perceptions about this compromise:

My understanding, working for the department, was this really was driven more by the federal government and specifically the Title I legislation. For states to continue to receive their federal Title I dollars, they needed to comply with the US Department of Education requirements, which did have pieces about state standards, assessments, accountability for student achievement, adequate yearly progress, in Title I.

A common perception expressed was that the intent of HF 2272 may have originated with federal legislation – but as the bill was crafted, it was designed to be more than simply a compliance mechanism. Some saw the bill

as a way to converge federal measures with state policy in a way that would streamline the process for the school districts. One state department official stated, "So if this is a federal requirement, then we roll it into the state requirement so that the school districts aren't trying to respond to two different masters." In addition, many participants saw this bill as 'compromise' – a way to meet federal requirements yet still maintain the elements that they felt were unique and essential in Iowa's policy. According to a policy advisor:

It took about 18 months of negotiating between our Department of Education and the US Department of Education to convince them that our way of having standards and assessments and accountability in Iowa would meet the same standards that they were meeting in other states but allowing us to maintain local control.

Another department official stated the process of negotiation as part of the bill design: "We, as a state, needed to come up with something that we could say, well we're complying with some of the federal legislation, this is how we might do it in Iowa because we're the only state that doesn't have mandated state standards. So, how were we going to comply?"

Many legislators and policy influentials acknowledged the federal/national pressure to conform. However, most also acknowledged that Iowans were not willing to accept these pressures without other valid reasons to do so. One policy advisor made it clear that Iowa "was not going to roll over and play dead

and just adopt whatever standards are out there and just force them on everybody.” If complying with federal ESEA requirements would also enhance education in Iowa, then policymakers agreed that it was beneficial to enact legislation that would assure compliance. The most common perception expressed was that the idea of HF 2272 may have originated with federal legislation – but the bill was really intended to improve education in Iowa, not just comply with federal requirements. While there was not universal agreement that schools were in decline, most agreed that improved schools – and increased student achievement – is a desirable goal.

Improving Iowa Schools

There was not, however, unanimous agreement about how this bill was intended to improve education. Several different avenues through which this legislation would lead to improved education were offered by participants. Some participants felt that this bill would lead to improved schools through an renewed focus on students achievement. Others felt that this bill was intended to strengthen local control – and elicit the involved support of communities to push for improved schools. Some perceived the intent of this legislation to be a way to compare school districts so that those whose achievement was “below par” would be forced to improve or collapse.

Refocusing on student achievement. “People ask me, what have you accomplished in the legislature? I often say, I think one of the most important things I’ve done is to help refocus schools on student achievement.” -- Legislator

One of the ideas repeated frequently explaining how HF 2272 would lead to improved schools was that schools would become more focused on certain functions because they would be reporting to the public about those functions. This idea was reflected in a question posed by a policy advisor: "How much would this strategy really improve instruction or was it just accountability? I really think the intent was to continue to help kids achieve at higher levels. The fact that you start asking the questions and make people report it out you start paying attention to it." A state department official stated his perception: "I guess my belief is what gets measured and recorded you pay attention to." Some perceived this legislation as helpful in identifying those areas in which particular schools might have weak spots, and focus improvement efforts on the reported weaknesses. "It can be used to improve," according to one state legislator. "How do you know what to focus on if you don't know exactly where your problems are?" Others agreed that this legislation would focus school districts on the student achievement data required to report, and that focus would lead to increased results. One state senator was explicit about her intents, "I think this is pretty clear that we need to focus our schools on student achievement." Asked about the legislators' intent, a policy advisor replied, "I think it really came from well-intentioned policy makers who wanted to see increased emphasis on student achievement and how well we were dealing with student achievement at the local and state level." One state senator stated his perspective this way: "Where you shine the spotlight, you usually change results."

Strengthened local control and involvement. "We have a religion in Iowa and it's called local control. I guess it just started that way and that's the way it's always been."-- Legislator

Participants in this study went to great lengths – with very little encouragement – to articulate their perspectives about the concept of local control and its importance to the people of Iowa. More than one legislator alluded to the fact that local control has such significance to Iowans, it is seen as parallel in sacredness to religion. One state senator described her earliest lesson in the legislature as learning that, "the major religion in Iowa is local control. That's really the major religion." Other participants discussed the concept of local control as central to their own beliefs and political philosophies. A state representative articulated her beliefs this way: "I guess that's part of my Republican philosophy, let the people be hands on and let the people have the say and that puts the onus of responsibility then on the people involved."

Not everyone agreed that local control is in fact a reality in Iowa. "We're less a local control state than we really think we are," stated one policy advisor. She continued, "We broadcast that all the time, we're a local control state, but I think when you look at the legislation that's been passed and the direction we've moved in this state, there's less and less true local control in the sense that we understand local control." A long-time state legislator spoke of the "myth" of local control: "I think it's more myth than reality, but it is a widely held myth in Iowa that there is all this local control." Other participants stated that local control is not a

philosophy uniquely peculiar to Iowa. "Yes, we're the only one known to have local control; we're not, in my opinion, as different as some of the other states," stated one department official. One policy influential found it amusing that Iowa calls itself the leading local control state:

It's hysterical if you say that here in Iowa we lead local control, and if you talk to anybody in Texas they'll tell you that they lead local control and if you talk to anybody in New Hampshire they'll tell you that they're a local control state. So it is absolutely not unique to this state because they all believe that they are believers in local control.

However, all seemed to be in consensus about the importance of the perception of local control. The policymakers understood the political importance of maintaining the perception of local control in order to be in concert with the nature of the constituency, as stated by one legislator, "because we have an Iowa culture of what we call local control." Another legislator referred to the overriding political philosophy in the state is that "everybody, every legislator, wants to leave mandates at the local level." Yet another legislator described the culture this way, "We have this kind of a Midwestern stubbornness in terms of we can do it better locally." A state department official agreed, "It's never fun to be told what to do. We in Iowa have that natural resistance."

In no policy area is this commitment to local control more important than in educational policy, according to several of the participants. Many of those

interviewed made reference to the historical longevity of local control of the schools in Iowa. A department official remarked:

I think it's because historically, the numbers of schools we had were unlike any other state in the country. If you look historically at the Iowa legislature and the territorial legislature, it shows that they wanted to make sure that no child lived more than two miles away from a school -- it was, I think, a value of the people who located here that we would commit to that.

Many of those interviewed credited a local control as a significant factor in the longstanding high quality of Iowa's schools. A state representative voiced this belief when she stated, "The power of the local school board and the ownership of the local community have been an extremely positive force in Iowa's education." A state department official credits Iowa's history of successful schools as being based on "the tradition of having that authority and responsibility. It was really a local community school."

"Iowa has always been very focused on local control," declared one legislator. Politically, the emphasis on local control has had a direct impact on policy. This influence is seen not only in historical policy development, but according to many participants, defined how HF 2272 was designed to improve education. One state department official was explicit in his understanding of this connection: "Now if things were different in Iowa, if the taxpayers didn't still care deeply, if the communities didn't care who was elected to their boards, if they

didn't care about student achievement, you'd probably have a different policy." Some even went as far as to say that it was the most important criteria in setting educational policy: "There's so many other influences there. Yet, in fact, that influence to keep our schools autonomy is the number one priority, regardless of anything else, it's the number one priority."

Not surprisingly, one of the strongest themes that emerged from these interviews was the perception that a strengthened bond between communities and their schools would ultimately lead to school improvement. The first component of this bond that was needed, according to many participants, was an increased sharing of information from schools to community members. One policy advisor felt that communication was the primary intent of HF 2272, as she stated, "Without second-guessing the legislators, what I think the discussion was about was being able to share with integrity a picture of what education in Iowa looks like." Some participants felt that the schools had not been gathering enough information, or had not been collecting the right kind of information, as expressed by this state legislator, "When you asked for particular information to find out what's inside these data, it was clear there weren't any measurements." This perception was shared by a state department official who stated, "I think we have a long history having good information about our students. But I'm not certain that everyone was in tune with that or thought it was the right information." For other participants, there was the perception that schools were not doing an adequate job of informing the public. One legislator remarked, "A

lot of legislators don't think that a lot of districts provide enough information about their schools." Several expressed ideas similar to the thoughts of a policy advisor who stated, "They were hoping to be able to get better information direct to the parents and community about what was happening." Many participants expressed the idea that schools hadn't necessarily been negligent in their communication efforts, but that the need for information about student achievement had become increasingly more important. The idea of being uncertain about school quality increased the need for more information, as expressed by a state department official who stated: "There were questions about how do we know? We think our schools are doing well, we look at the achievement data, we think we're doing well, but how do we know?" This idea was echoed by a policy advisor as he explained his ideas regarding what the legislators were hoping to accomplish when they passed HF 2272:

My perception, the understanding of how things work at the capitol, is that there were voices and constituents saying we want to know if our schools are doing a good job...They really believed that people need to have more information about how kids are doing.

Many of those interviewed expressed a belief that increased communication with the community would lead to pressure placed on the schools to achieve at higher levels. A policy advisor agreed with the concept of benefits from increased information when she stated, results that increased communication could be beneficial: "I think they were really counting on having

that reporting mechanism to people in the community, that that would help shine the light and make some sense for them to get engaged with their schools.”

The increased information sharing and interest would set into motion a chain of connections by which communities would both expect more from their schools and provide more support for schools to meet those expectations. This connection between stronger community involvement and improved schools was expressed in multiple ways by many of the participants of this study. “Our intent was a way for parents and other stakeholder to become far more involved in the process because they could see what was happening,” remarked a state senator. Others stated the connection of communities to their schools as a strength to build upon for school improvement. A policy advisor stated, “We are very fortunate in this state that the communities care deeply about their schools. It’s major because people feel very very strongly about the quality of their schools.” A state department official revealed, “One of our strongest assets is tremendous community oversight of education. ...We do a lot of things in Iowa by just helping people to understand what’s going on. That’s a level of commitment that has to exist locally. Reports show in Iowa that it does.” A long time state legislator articulated how this bill was intended to draw on that strength in order to improve schools in Iowa:

When there is transparency, when communities understand, in specific and usable and practical terms, what the schools in their area say they’re going to do and then how well they perform in

doing that, then only good things can come from that. That public support for public education actually grows and increases when they see that their schools are being accountable. The bill is supposed to get school districts, school boards, administrators, and teachers to engage in an introspection of what they're doing and why they're doing it and how they're doing it-- to hold that conversation broadly, to talk with the employers, to talk with the PTA, to talk with any identifiable group within the community who feel they need the input into the public school system, to have those conversations outside of their own families. That's what the intent was. If that all in fact occurs, improvement will also occur because people will want to achieve at higher levels. There will be a culture of continuous improvement in the public schools.

Other participants affirmed this perception of connection with communities leading to improved schools. They were explicit in stating that communities would then provide support to districts in an effort to meet those joint goals. Another long time state representative shared her intent: "It makes that school board accountable and then the same time involves students, parents in the community to know what those [goals] are and a method to involve the community in helping to achieve those goals."

Improving schools through comparisons. Participants were divided on their thoughts of whether or not HF 2272 was intended to provide a vehicle for

comparing school districts in terms of student achievement, thereby allowing a "ranking" of schools districts within the state. Several of those interviewed felt that the legislation was purposely crafted so as NOT to allow comparisons between individual schools nor between school districts. One state representative stated, "Every district is different and every school within that district is different. When you take the whole state, you compare apples to oranges." When asked if the intent of this legislation was to allow districts to be compared with each other in terms of student achievement; another state representative replied emphatically, "The intent was not to compare districts."

Other participants in the study felt certain that the intent of HF 2272 was to allow for comparisons among districts. According to one legislator, who recalled what she intended the bill would accomplish as it was being written, "Some of us proponents of the bill were trying to put in very objective measures, apples to apples, that it would be this, so you could compare Ames with Waterloo, Davenport with Walnut." Another state representative echoed this thought, "The public deserves to know how you're doing compared to other districts." Some participants acknowledged the resistance to compare schools, but still viewed the ability to make these comparisons as vital in the improvement process. Referring to the ability to compare school districts and also to compare achievement data of schools within the district, a state department official stated, "It frightened a lot of people." One state representative stated, "I know that bringing competition or comparisons, makes people uneasy, but I think overall that's the way we're

headed.” Several participants felt that the ability to compare districts would be an impetus for communities to become more aware of the achievement status of their schools. One legislator remarked, “Now I can say, ‘your district, they live right next door to me, but your district is doing much better than mine is in terms of reading ability.’ ” Another legislator made the connection to school improvement: “They’re going to be comparing surrounding school districts and buildings, and then they’re going to say, ‘Okay, why?’ and then they’re going to start questioning and then that will seek improvements. It’ll just raise that bar, and then everybody’s bar is going to be raising every year.”

Another strong theme that emerged was the idea that comparing achievement results among districts would place pressure on ‘inferior’ districts to improve, consolidate, or close. One avenue for exerting this pressure is the possibility of increased parental choice. A state legislator voiced how parents might use the comparative achievement data to choose a different school:

If I’m sending my child to a school whose reading scores at the third grade level are traditionally, repetitively below par, do I want to go to that school and say I’m not satisfied with that, or do I want to open enroll my child in another school?

Others spoke of how some school districts might see that type of comparison as threatening their viability: “They’re afraid, you know, because of our open enrollment law, that if someone is not the same comparison then they’ll probably leave. I mean there’s the potential they could leave.” A state

department official voiced the intent this way: "There may have been some legislators who specifically thought the intention was to demonstrate the school's performance and still give the parents some choice." Several participants saw this bill as a step forward in providing even greater options of school choice. A state senator remarked that this type of legislation will lead to other bills that offer options for parents: "I think we'll get a public charter bill, and then I think is introduced the idea that parents who want to can figure out a way to start their own school."

Several participants stated that HF 2272 was intended as "back door" entry into forced consolidation of smaller, rural districts in Iowa. This would be accomplished through one of two methods. One method mentioned would be the comparative pressure placed on districts outlined above. A policy advisor stated that the quality of schools was beginning to differentiate along the urban/rural divide: "One of the things that we looked at was that data between rural and urban schools. The data was starting to show that the rural schools were not performing as they once had." This comparison would lead to pressure for smaller rural districts to consolidate. This was stated explicitly by one state representative: "I think that is where you get into some comparisons between big and large districts, small and middle-sized districts, districts that maybe should have merged and those that didn't. I think that this has created another climate for more mergers." The other method by which this legislation would lead to rural school consolidations the resource intensive requirements of the bill. While

acknowledging that these requirements would be difficult for all districts, many participants expressed that it would be all but impossible for smaller districts to comply. This was stated succinctly by a state senator who said, "God only knows how any of this stuff could be implemented in a small rural school."

Participants offered reasons that they believed certain political factions were motivated to close or consolidate smaller school districts. "It goes back to that whole concept that some school districts aren't getting their fair share of the money. If you talk with most of the urban legislators, they [feel] that they are paying more in taxes and not getting a fair return on their taxes because these small districts are getting propped up by the taxes that these large school districts pay." This same legislator also stated that, politically, the legislation would not be supported if these motives were overt: "they'll tell you that they think small school districts are very inefficient and should be closed or consolidated, although they know they'll never get any kind of legislation passed that will do that."

Political Gains

"You can't separate politics from policy making." -- Policy Advisor

While most of the comments offered by the participants focused on the intended effects of HF 2272 on the educational system, there were also other factors mentioned that influenced the crafting of this bill. Many participants referred to political factors that contributed support for this bill for reasons other than improving education in Iowa. One political factor was the ever present goal

of re-election. Another factor mentioned by some participants was the desire of lawmakers to send a political message to the educational community. Other participants felt that HF 2272 may have been part of a strategy designed to undermine support for public education.

The quest for re-election. "It was an election year." – Policy Advisor

A number of legislators and policymakers referred to the quest for re-election. One policy advisor spoke of legislators who voted for the bill even though they may have had some reservations, because they "recognized that you can't vote against student achievement. It's political." Another policy advisor put it, "It was an election year, and you can't be against student achievement." A state senator reflected on campaigns based on criticism of public schools, stating "that political rhetoric drums up a lot of folks who are concerned about education, the parents and the communities, and accordingly a lot of politicians play that card when in essence they don't even know what they're doing."

Less explicit intents. "Well, there's insider stuff – that's the stuff you'll never hear publicly from anybody." -- Legislator

The bid for re-election seemed an overt and acceptable rationale for supporting HF 2272. Several of the participants in this study, however, referred to motivation for this bill as more complex and covert. In the words of one legislator, "There is a conceptual idea that parties and politicians want the public to perceive, and then the reality of day to day legislative life, all that is tossed out the window. They do what they damn well please." Another legislator referred to

the 'behind the scenes' intents of HF 2272, stating she didn't realize it at the time the bill was passed, but "I'm convinced of it now." What were those covert intents? According to some participants in this study, there were at least two reasons not publicly acknowledged for passing HF 2272. One was to send a punitive message to the educational community, the second was to undermine support for public education.

A message to the educational community. "And then on the flip side, the sort of political side of it, to me it's just another jab at teachers."-- Legislator

One factor that was reported by a number of the participants is the perception of a politically based struggle between certain elected officials and members of the educational community. One state senator stated her perceptions of this relationship this way: "I also believe that from a partisan fashion, there is payback. There is certainly a group of people that hold an awful lot of power in the Iowa legislature who is anti-teacher. They're not anti-education, but they're anti-teacher." One legislator shared his perceptions of a rationale for this 'anti-teacher' sentiment: "[It's] because they see teachers together as a unit as voting for one party over the other." Referring not to her own, but to her perceptions of other legislators, another state representative stated that the bill resulted from a "lack of trust in the teaching profession, ... a lack of respect for the teachers that they can't do their job." Another state representative shared her perspective on attitudes of public school professionals, "Iowa public schools resist change, they resist change on this, they resist change

on the Teacher Quality Bill that was adopted last year. They simply have the philosophy of leave us alone, let us do things the way we've been doing them, and by the way, give us more money."

Undermining support for public education. "[It's] another way to show that public schools are failing" -- Legislator

The view was expressed by a few of the participants that this legislation was a piece of a larger plan designed to undermine support for public education. Two participants alluded to "that right-wing agenda." One participant, a state representative, went into some depth in describing this "conspiracy theory", stating that HF 2272 is intended to be "another way to show that public schools are failing so that they can justify giving more money to private schools." This participant continued to explain this perspective:

If you think logically about what they're trying to do with 2272. As more and more diversity comes into the public schools, it becomes harder to meet the standards without putting more money into education. The next logical step then if schools are failing, they can't meet the needs of the kids, is then to turn to charter schools and vouchers, further segregating society and achieving the political goals of providing public money for private schools. It's pretty well orchestrated -- it's pretty easy to see through that rhetoric, but often we don't see it coming until it's too late.

How the Process Worked

A Shift in Intent?

"And there are times when they will come back and say, I didn't understand what I was passing." – Policy Advisor

Several of the participants alluded to the idea that legislation is often written in general terms outlining the general intent that legislators had in mind. This general legislation proceeds to become more detailed through the rules process. Because so many different bills come through on so many different issue areas, legislators can only familiarize themselves with the general ideas. They must rely on committee members, policy advisors, caucus staff to inform them, and they must rely on the rules process to craft the administrative rules true to the original general intent. One policy advisor, commenting on the legislators' roles, stated:

They're moving on so many things, they're moving so many bills so rapidly, that often times, they're voting with the caucus without having even read the bill. It happens. You're hoping there are certain people that have managed the bill who have worked with the staff, and you trust that they know what they're doing.

Several participants stated that evolution is often a part of the legislative process. One state representative remarked that these types of compromises are the strength of the legislative process:

I'm of the opinion that nobody's ever always right and nobody's ever always wrong. And there's always middle ground that is probably better than either one...and uh that's kind of the way I've always looked at doing things. And that way, everybody's happy. ...And when you've got people who are happy and buying the concept well then you're more able to achieve it and it's going to work.

Another legislator recognized that the tendency to be too general can be a liability in maintaining the integrity of the intent: "When you do stuff like this you've got to be very cautious as to generic language. You certainly learn that there are other elements out there that may not have the same goals as you do."

A recurring idea that emerged from the interviews was that legislators supported HF 2272 with some idea of how the law would impact schools, as stated by one policy advisor, "Back to that legislative intent, they had some clear ideas of what they wanted to achieve." However, as the bill moved through the legislative and administrative process, legislators began to view the impact of HF 2272 differently. A legislator commented on her perception of how the process may alter the essence of policymakers' original plans:

And we have seen, over time, you can tweak the system to do certain kinds of things. ... When you started to look at the plans people agreed to, they started to work them out, they started to put them together, they thought they looked good. When you then try

to make it into legislation, it can get real goofy just because of the process.

Several legislators and policy advisors stated that the idea that the bill seemed fairly minor, innocuous when it was introduced and then presented for a vote. "The bill at first I thought was really benign," stated one legislator. "I saw it as an administrative task by some building principal or curriculum director...filling out a form, basically reporting what they had done and what they're going to do in the future." This legislator continues to speak about how she felt the intent of the bill changes: "That was the intent of the legislature at the time, to have a simple process. But it turned out to be things other than that. Administrative rules came into to play."

Many of the legislators acknowledged that the rules process is a typical way that bills evolve: "Of course, with rules, which is where a lot of the decision are made, there may have been changes." Another representative described how the rules process worked with HF 2272, "The rules are obviously where the meat of this bill is, in terms of we put intent language in, the rules really are the how to." Another legislator mentioned that she had some concerns about the bill, but her concerns were allayed because "there were a lot of things in there that we were told that through the rules process would make it less onerous."

Several legislators mentioned that they felt their original intent of what HF2272 would accomplish changed during the process of rules writing. One legislator was explicit in voicing the perception that a shift occurred: "I think that

what was in 2272 and what was actually the rules that came out of the that [process] were two different things.” Another legislator expressed his chagrin in how the intent of 2272 changed during the process, stating “I’m very, very disappointed in the way the process worked, I’m disappointed in the administrative rules, and I’m disappointed in the end product.” This state senator goes on to describe his changing perspective of the bill’s impact: “I had envisioned administrators everywhere leaning back to their bookshelves grabbing the three ring binder with test results and reporting them and their progress from time to time. ...What transpired was at the classroom level then it wasn’t just a mere reporting it was redefining a lot of what you taught.”

Another legislator was more pointed – and more partisan-- in his opinion. Referring to Republican members of the House Education Committee, he stated, “They had the state department write the rules the way they wanted them... and then the rules committee, which is made up of a majority of Republicans, passed that rules version which was not what we passed legislatively.” When asked if he felt the intent of the law changed during the rules process, this legislator responded, “Right, correct. The state department really subverted legislative intent and the members of the committee got more out of the rules writing process than they could in the bill legislation, so they went ahead and approved the rules.” A policy advisor summarized how he viewed the shifting perspective of HF2272 during the rules process:

They have to do what's within the intent of the law, but they have a lot of discretion in terms of interpreting that law and creating the rules to enforce it and implement it. I think when the rules start to reach people, they said, whoa, this is not innocuous, this is going to be time consuming and a major resource strain in terms of money and time and people.

One of the participants, a state senator, recalled his attempts to redirect the legislation back to what he felt was the original intent, and the lesson he felt he learned from this experience:

We gave the department the ability to implement rules and promulgate them and to go through the hearing process. I was at some of those rules meetings and I went to the rules committee and expressed some of my concerns. ... I asked them, in fact, begged them to send them back to the department of education. None of that happened. So, by that time, what I thought was a benign bill, had become something different at the department of education, and I learned my first big lesson about being too general in legislative terms to let a bureaucracy then mold it into something that was really something that in my opinion was really quite different.

Same Bill, Different Emphasis

"When we originally did it, there were the two pieces – the reporting piece and the benchmark assessment piece."—Policy Advisor

Other participants offered quite a different perspective of how they felt the this legislation shifted. They saw the shift as one of impact, rather than intent. Several participants saw the bill has having two major parts – one part involved setting goals, standards, and benchmarks; the other part involved publicly reporting student achievement data. Many commented that they originally focused on the public reporting as the more controversial piece. One policy advisor stated, "I think as we saw it, we were more involved in the reporting piece of the test scores." Another participant addressed this same idea, "We thought the big deal was the reporting of the schools to the local people." This sentiment was echoed by a participant who stated, "That was the bigger area for our caucus, the reporting,.... That was the big deal for us, letting the locals know how their schools were doing."

As the process evolved and feedback on the impact of this legislation started to reach the policymakers, many were surprised by the responses they received from local school district personnel. The feedback they received indicated that the public reporting was not the piece that placed more significant demands on the resources of the school districts. A policy advisor commented, "But the big fallout was the second part – having this goal-setting and setting the

benchmarks and then having this one big plan that's cohesive throughout the entire district."

These participants suggested that the bill placed demands on schools that were not intended – or anticipated -- by this particular piece of legislation. This was due, in part, to a lack of understanding of prevailing practices in the schools at the time the bill was passed. One policy advisor explained a perception of how this misunderstanding may have occurred:

You're looking at the code as a legislator, and you're talking to the department of education, and it says it's in there, so you assume that every school's done it, that they've sat down and they've had these groups, brought in parents, brought in community people, set these goals, decide what they were going to do. And depending on who was involved, they have their take on what their schools do. So you have a take on what's out there and what's in code and what your own schools are doing and how proactive they are and you don't realize that it isn't consistent across the state. When you know it's in the code, and you know your school's doing it, you would assume that you were making the process easier, and then you start hearing the complaints.

This participant goes on to describe possible reasons for the surprising feedback that legislators were receiving on this bill:

The part where we set the joint filing and all these goals, in my mind it wasn't that big of a deal. It was going to require some work, but it was already in code. ...We didn't realize that schools were not doing it at all and we thought actually having the CSIP was going to be hugely beneficial to schools because it would cut down on their paperwork. We thought it was a streamlined process that we were really helping out. Because we thought the skeleton was already there, this would help. But the framework wasn't in place, and we didn't realize that. Although it sat in code for years and years and years, we didn't realize that nobody was really using it.

One of the participants, a policy advisor, commented on what was perceived as a lapse in information sharing: "I think we relied a lot on the Department of Education, and I think they knew much more than we knew how this was in the schools, but they didn't convey how huge it was."

Hindsight

When asked to reflect on their opinions about the bill in hindsight, four years after HF2272 passed the Iowa Legislature, participants gave mixed reviews. Several participants felt the bill was a good idea, and that it had shown some positive outcomes so far. Other participants felt that they would have made changes in the bill given the chance to go back in history and revise the process. Some of these changes suggested that the legislation did not go far

enough. Many of the changes expressed ideas about how the bill might have been revised to avoid some of the pitfalls that they perceive in its implementation. Several participants expressed overall concerns about future negative impacts of this type of legislation, and suggested that no legislation at all would have been a better option.

Positive Outcomes

Most of the positive outcomes reported by participants reflected some of the intents that legislators had in mind for improving education in Iowa. A legislator stated how she perceived the process helped improve school districts in general in Iowa:

Most of them put a good face on it and say this has been a good positive exercise to go through to raise our consciousness on how we can go about improving our schools. We thought we were doing that before, but it [was] more an unconscious level, and this made it definitely a conscious thing.

A policy advisor stated that the positive impact differed according to individual school districts: "I think for some schools it has made that difference, and they have taken it to heart and they have focused and they have learned to set goals, and they have learned how to measure them." Another policy advisor felt that the process helped school districts positively re-focus their energies, as she commented:

I thought it was good. Whether it was at the department or at the districts or AEA's or universities, people were talking more about kids' learning. It did actually cause some of those conversations to occur. For 2, 3, 4 years there, the conversations and the workshops and things were focused on student achievement, standards benchmarks, and assessment.

Changes They'd Make

Many of the participants reflected about changes they would have made in HF 2272 if they had the chance. Some participants supported the intent of the legislation, and felt that it may have the potential to effectively improve schools. However, in hindsight, they expressed the idea that the bill would have been more effective if it had been written differently.

HF2272 didn't go far enough: No set standard. Several mentioned that the bill was a beginning point in improving school achievement but that it didn't go far enough – it didn't place high enough expectations or tight enough requirements that would be required for significant improvement. Many mentioned that the goal of "improvement" was too vague. One policymaker expressed this perception: "Who's going to set the standard? They said you have to improve test scores. Well, how much is an improvement?" Another participant echoed the same concept when she commented, "The only thing we're looking at is improvement. We're requiring schools to show some improvement. I think we need to think about some standard that everybody has to get to as far as

achievement goes.” Another policy advisor made a similar point: “I think we ought to be requiring these schools to get to some minimum... In the absence of any standard, you can improve a small amount and never be good enough and never be what I would want for my kids.” A legislator also felt that the lack of a specific standard may have hindered the bill’s effectiveness: “That’s part of the problem, we basically say as long as you go through to motions, as long as you fulfill the bureaucratic requirements, it okay with us.”

HF2272 didn’t go far enough: No sanctions or interventions. One participant expressed the idea that merely reporting was not enough to achieve improved schools. This state representative bemoaned how he perceived the schools complying with the legislation. “They go through the motions, do what the legislature and the Department of Education tell them they have to do, and then get left alone.” Another legislator felt that school improvement would not occur soon enough: “I had this tremendous sense of urgency, I wanted it to be sooner. I am somewhat resistant to just allow school districts to develop school improvement plans. I’m a little disappointed.” A policy advisor felt that the state should respond with an intervention if schools do not meet a set standard: “I think we ought to be requiring these schools to get to some minimum. And then after some period of time, if they’re still not there, then maybe talk pretty seriously about some sort of sanction, more support or something that helps then get there. Because, as of now, there’s no intervention piece.”

Assessment changes. Some of the participants were fairly comfortable with the bill as it passed, but mentioned some changes that they would make if they had the chance. Several of the changes suggested dealt with the assessment measures. "We probably should have been more clear about the multiple measures," commented a policy advisor. Another policy advisor suggested, "I would give the schools even more flexibility with the assessments that they use. Not those standardized tests, I think taking one of those is great." Another policymaker would have preferred a broader concept of system assessment:

I would look at those state indicators, not just the achievement, part of that is ITBS, but I'd look at things like dropout rates, and I would give some thought to maybe expanding those other state indicators to include some other things, because I don't think those are the only factors.

A legislator voiced this concern about the assessment measures included in the bill:

This really doesn't help move anywhere. It just highlights things that are already known. It doesn't help some schools, that sort of thing. It was just one measure, that's the worst thing about it. I don't know if there would have been some way to craft something where you had a variety of measures, and some ways to measure.

Something a little more meaningful. It's so complex and complicated; I don't know how you could ever do that.

Changes to the reporting process. A few participants felt that the reporting requirements need improving. A policy advisor indicated that this was the weakest piece: "The part I'm not sure we're doing a good enough job at is still the reporting out to the community." A state senator expressed how she felt after reading reports from several districts: "I'm a little disappointed... Some of those plans aren't what I had in mind." Another legislator was specific in his criticism of the reporting process: "I have read some of the reports to the community, one of the first things that I always ask is, is this something that is easily read and understood by a wide audience? Largely, I would say the reports to the communities have not been. They have largely been superficial, public relations documents."

Concerns About Negative Impacts

Time demands. Several legislators felt that the bill as it passed may have had positive intents, but many were critical of the lack of support and resources provided to school districts in order to benefit from the legislation. Many of the criticisms of the bill as implemented centered on the issue of time. Some of the concerns about time dealt with the amount of time spent by teachers and other school personnel in order to comply with the legislation, as one legislator stated, "People worry about the paperwork and it's too cumbersome." Another state representative mentioned that measuring progress on benchmarks became very

time intensive for classroom teachers: "It caused a nightmare of paperwork for the teachers." Yet another legislator shared the concern that teacher-time taken away from instruction could have negative results, as she commented, "Whenever you take time away from a teacher to fill out bureaucratic paperwork, you are taking time away from kids, because there's only so much time in the school year and we have enough distractions and we have enough problems in the classroom itself we don't need more distractions." Another participant, also a legislator, equated testing with measuring progress on standards and benchmarks, and was also concerned about the amount of time he perceived that teacher might need to spend testing students: "If I had to spend more time testing kids instead of teaching, I'm not doing what I was hired to do as a teacher."

Another set of concerns about time pertained to the system level time (as opposed to classroom time) spent in developing the goals, standards and benchmarks. Several participants mentioned the amount of time required by district personnel in order to effectively follow the intent of the legislation. They saw this time demand as a drain on district resources. One legislator stated that he received feedback about the legislation as it was being implemented – the value of the legislation was recognized, but he reported that, "they started saying how much time this is taking; how important it was, but how much time it was taking." Another legislator also saw time, as well as adequate support, as a barrier for effective implementation, commenting that "the problem is that

obviously schools didn't put the time or effort into doing it the way they needed to be done." A longer time frame would have made for more effective implementation according to a policy advisor who said, "you know, let us phase things in, let us phase. We've had multiple assessments for several years and we're still where we need to be with that."

Lack of support: No funding. Many of the participants recognized the fact that additional support for schools in the form of time would require funding. Some saw the lack of funding as a drawback to the legislation as it was passed, stated explicitly by one participant: "I think the biggest thing I would have done differently is I would have found a funding strand." This sentiment was echoed by another state representative who said, "The state didn't pay any more money, and that's the fallacy." He continues to explain why he felt funding was critical, stating, "If you're going to do this and implement 2272 in the right way with standards and benchmarks, what you really needed to do was to put money into that to allow teachers to have that time – that was the original proposal." This same legislator felt that mandating more requirements from the districts without supporting them placed school districts in a difficult bind: "Schools were trying to do everything they could to try and get the goals met. ... They weren't given the money or the resources by the state of Iowa to do that, and so consequently they did the best way they could; ... but the schools and the state weren't willing to put real time and effort into what needed to be done to create a true assessment system." Another policy advisor shared this criticism: "That's probably one of the

shortcomings (of the bill as it is being implemented). With something like this, we just have no time. People have expectations, [but] this is going to take some time, take some dollars, take some people." Still another participant made a similar point, but recognized that sufficient funding would not be easy to find, remarking that "what needed to happen with 2272 was the resources needed to be there to allow that to happen at the local level, not the state level. And that takes resources, fiscal resources, human resources, it really would be difficult."

Lack of support for the process. Other participants recognized the need for school districts to be supported -- not just through additional funding and time, but also through direction in the process. Staff development was not available enough according to a policy advisor who stated that the districts needed funding for the assessment process, "and even more than the assessment, the real good staff development that is necessary to, once you measure, to figure out what to do." One policy advisor mentioned the AEAs as a possible source of support in the process: "The only thing I would have done differently is I would have had a better concept and I would have had the DE go to the AEA's and have the AEA's set something up... I know it's tough, but it's a good idea, and it gives people an idea of where to start." Another participant also saw the AEAs as a possible source of support, but wondered if the resources necessary for implementation had been considered before the legislation was put into place: "While the intent was good, sometimes I think we question whether the support mechanisms were really adequate resources. I don't mean just money, although ultimately things

are measured in money. Were the AEAs equipped to do that, did we have the personnel, did we have the knowledge to support 330 and some districts? That might have been one piece that wasn't quite ready for this legislation."

Concerns about the policy direction. "I think there was some underlying concern about what we would do about the test scores and where was it going." – Policy Advisor

Some participants were concerned that this legislation might set the stage for more standardization. One legislator remarked that the feedback received from school district personnel was not positive, stating, "They still are not having a lot of good things to say to this. They think it's a foot in the door to state testing, ...and we don't want to go that route." Another participant felt that this bill may lead to state wide standards because of the difficulty of monitoring individual district plans. This policy advisor suggested that eventually the state would require school districts to "have one kind of uniform look I think DE learned a lesson, and so did we. All these different school districts have this different requirements, and how are you going to enforce that?" A state representative intimated that Iowa is already closer to state standards than it readily admits:

By always throwing the message out there, that it's the Iowa way, we're going to maintain local control, it gives people the sense that we're local control and we're thumbing our noses at everybody else. And so on the one hand, I think there is some credence to the position that we're not just going to roll over and play dead and

just adopt whatever standards are out there and just force them on everybody. But in reality, the way we operate, we're kind of working on the state standards model wrapped in local control wrappings

Additional participants expressed concern that 2272 was inching toward state wide standards which would eventually mean a weakened – or complete loss of – local control. One policy advisor described how the demands of complying with 2272 may force a loss of local control:

As it got to the point of needing to be implemented, and all of the things that came along with it, then the feedback started to be...it was like, maybe this isn't...maybe local control isn't what we need.

Another policy advisor expressed a concern that interfering with local control would lead to a lower quality of public education in Iowa:

We run the risk of interfering with that (high expectations placed on schools by communities) by imposing too much state legislation.

We run a great risk of interfering if you impose it from the federal level. They're so far removed from our communities, and I think that's one of the things we see in "No Child Left Behind." It may be well intended, but it can have some devastating outcomes.

Negative impacts of assessment requirements. Several participants pointed to issues with testing and assessment and voiced concerns about how these issues may negatively impact educational systems. Many of these issues

focused on the time and emphasis that assessment procedures may take, at the cost of time and resources for other 'untested' portions of the school curriculum. One legislator was explicit in what areas she felt would be neglected: "If these bills keep coming, the first things that are going to go are the specials [such as art, music, physical education], which is a crime. A well-rounded kid is educated not just in the core subjects." Others commented about taking more time from the school day for assessment. A policymaker remarked, "What might be counterproductive is the need for more and more assessment, more and more testing. If we're going to report more and more student achievement, then probably most people guess they have to do more assessment, which takes away from their structured time." A legislator echoed a similar perspective: "And another thing is, teaching to whatever the outcome is going to be. Now that is not good. If you have to teach to a test, you're not doing your job, but some people might be forced into that."

Other participants recognized the complexity of assessment, and that raised some issues that this bill didn't address. A legislator was concerned that testing different groups each year would not give the kind of information that he felt would be useful: "Every year is different, it's the mixture you get in the classroom and sometimes you can't bring those scores up, no matter what you do." Other participants expressed the concern that testing without clear understanding of purposes was questionable. A policy advisor remarked, "If you want to test, go ahead and test, but what do you plan on doing with that

information? I'm not against testing, but what are you going to use it for?"

Another policy advisor spoke of the difficulty of achieving an appropriate balance between assessment and instruction:

I don't think we've found that balance that we're going to have to find between what's enough assessment so we really know how well our kids are doing so we can learn from the reporting, but not so much overboard that we are losing instruction time and testing our kids to death.

A state senator shared his perspective that building curriculum on the standards and benchmarks that prescribe what is to be instructed and assessed is only one of several viable curricular models. Selecting one approach, he feels, can define public education too narrowly. He explained:

Philosophically this is an approach to education. I'm not saying it is wholly wrong, I'm not saying that it's wholly right. I'm saying it is an approach, and there are good merits to this and there are bad merits, demerits if you want to call it that, to that approach. But whenever you codify a philosophy or an opinion of how something should be done, then you shut out all the other opinion and the other philosophical means.

No bill at all. "If I were to do one thing over again, I'd try to get the bill stopped. Just plain killed." -- Legislator

Perhaps some of the strongest statements came from some participants who, in hindsight, did not support the bill as it evolved. These participants were legislators who had originally voted for the bill, but regret supporting the bill once its implementation details became more clear. One state senator said he would have preferred "no law at all. We could have continued to do what we have been doing and students would have had more time to work with teachers and very little would have changed." He goes on to state, "We didn't need this. It didn't do any good overall. I look back on [several] years now, and there's only a handful of things I would have done differently as a senator, and this is certainly the most glaring of them all."

Yet another comment made by a legislator echoes a similar perspective:

If there was ever a vote I would ever take back it would certainly be this one and I would be very vocal in opposing the bill the way it was drafted and I would certainly be very vocal in terms of the debate on the floor and I would try to point out some of the things that happen.

Another legislators commented that he'd like a chance to start over and recreate 2272 in a completely different form, "I think I would probably gut this thing and start all over again if I had the choice...It was really not doing what we needed to be doing."

A better path to school improvement. A number of participants spoke in more general terms regarding their concerns of the negative impacts of 2272.

Many offered alternatives, suggesting that perhaps an approach in place 2272 would have been more effective means for improving education in Iowa. One participant remarked that 2272 wasn't enough in and of itself, explaining that "some things have changed, but the reason it's not a perfect environment is, even in the time since that legislation passed, we've had to do a lot of work, and we have a long way to go, to build the capacity in schools and districts to really gather and analyze the data to view and use the results."

A policy advisor spoke of taking the time for dialogue with lawmakers: One thing I wish I would have done would be to talk to more legislators who were the floor managers, or wherever this emerged, you know, education committee members and asked specifically what is your vision? How do you see this linking to the past and where do you see it leading? And I think a second piece of that that I would have pursued would have been what type of legislation do you think needs to follow this up? Because I do think sometimes with some of the legislation on educational accountability, it seems to be a little short-sighted in terms of we'll pass the bill, we expect results next year, and if not, we'll pass another bill.

HF 2272 represented a missed opportunity for one legislator, who expressed these thoughts:

We don't really sit down when we could, and this year would have been a great year to do that since we didn't really have much else, and not that you even have to put funding with it and not that you

have to pass legislation, but having a working group that could really talk about things and not feel the pressure of having only two more weeks....it could be ongoing, to be improving education for the future. What things do we want to change and how are they not working now? What things are working? Really sit down and not worry about politics and just work on it and talk about a long-term plan. Gradually then we could put a bill together, rather than worrying about one stab at a time.

The need for a comprehensive “big picture” approach was expressed by another legislator. When asked how she would have changed the legislation if she had the chance to do it again, she stated, “I think the biggest thing I would do would be try to make it a long range plan for education, whether it’s in terms of our funding programs or what’s going to be required by the feds. Where do we want education to be in our 21st century?”

DISCUSSION

An exploration of the policy process in Iowa’s enactment of HF 2272 shows that, once again, Iowa mirrors national trends but also makes some attempt to retain its individuality. What led to the inclusion of education accountability on the policy agenda in Iowa? Were policy makers in Iowa reacting to national trends, or did they respond to specifically Iowa conditions in developing this policy? Were the goals of Iowan policy makers similar to those of

school reformists in other states? Did the mechanism for reaching those goals set forth in HF 2272 logically lead to the outcomes desired?

Setting the Policy Agenda

Participants in this study recognized that national movements toward increased accountability and enhanced interest in student achievement alerted policy makers in Iowa to consider the need for policy development. As one of the participants remarked, "If they're talking about accountability everywhere else, maybe we ought to be thinking about it here." The seed for HF 2272 was thus planted outside the state, and drifted to Iowa by way of the prevailing winds.

The 'prevailing winds' originated in a number of different sources. In order for an issue to become part of the policy agenda, it must come to the attention of state policy makers. Wirt and Kirst (1989) state that four sources most often generate the type of attention that places an issue on the state policy setting agenda: public opinion and the media, the state political environment, intragovernmental factions, and policy issue networks. Participants in this study alluded to each of these sources as factors that led to the introduction of HF2272. . Several participants mentioned the influence of A Nation At Risk and Goals 2000 and the ensuing media coverage as setting the stage for standards based reform throughout the nation. Participants also mentioned the prevailing political climate in the state at the time; referring to partisan politics as well as the growing tension in the state between the educators and politicians. The long time state political culture (i.e., "Iowa stubbornness") and adherence to local

control was also frequently mentioned in light of Iowa's unique educational accountability policy. The idea of intragovernmental factions arose as reference to the negotiations between the state department of education and the federal government, as well as between the state legislature and local school boards.

The 1990s saw a marked increase in the influence of 'policy issue networks' (Mazonni, 1994; Wirt & Kirst, 1989; Kaplan & Usdan, 1994). Apparently, these networks made their mark in Iowa similarly to the ways that they impacted the rest of the nation. Although the term was not used by participants in this study, the influence of policy issue networks was implied by several. One legislator in this study recalled an example of this influence, stating: "As far as the origin [of HF 2272], I know that some other states were working on it and people that came back from a conference talked about it and initiated it and tried to get legislation passed."

Many of the participants in this study felt that HF 2272 was based on ideas developed through a number of sources. Some participants felt that this was a purely legislative initiative, others felt that it was initiated by the Iowa Department of Education, in response to requirements of federal legislation. In the words of one of the participants in the study in referring to the origin of HF 2272, "I'm not sure where it came from, I believe that it probably came from several different sources coming from the perception of need for something like this." As is often the case with this type of reform legislation, the origin of HF 2272 was most likely

the “product of coalition politics... born of many motives and amalgams of many ideas” (Fuhrman et al., 1988, p. 205)

One thing that was clear, however, in the minds of many of those interviewed – the idea behind HF 2272, in the words of one legislator in the study, “didn’t come from the schools, I can tell you that much.” This sense of reform imposed from outside the school community parallels the trend across the country in school reform initiatives common in the states during the past several decades. It also represents the concept of “top-down” authority and policy development in school reform. As Liggett and Johnston (1997) state, policy makers “frequently maintain a policy posture of ‘we make the policy; others implement it’” (p. 20). Policy makers are the chief ‘architects’ of policy, and charge implementers with the responsibility of following their blueprints – without the ability to provide input into those plans (Bardach, 1997).

Another national trend that the participants in this study recognized as influential in Iowa was the involvement of the business community in school reform. A participant in the study made an explicit connection: “One of the things that they were trying to do was apply some of the principles that businesses were talking about in terms of standards and accountability.” This statement reflects, among other influences, how business philosophy has changed thinking about school quality, and has helped influence a focus on quantifiable measurements and standards (Merrow, 2001).

Changing Concepts about Accountability

Reflecting the influence of the business community, concepts about accountability in education have shifted over the past several decades from attention on compliance to a focus on results. Iowa policy makers reflect this changing focus in their perceptions of how schools should be held accountable. Participants in this study discussed the term accountability at great lengths and shared their perspectives about recent reforms and their impacts on educational accountability.

One concept frequently cited by those interviewed was the idea of accountability as a type of information sharing, that reporting to the public was an integral component of accountability based on the 'public's right to know'. This concept of accountability would be considered a principal-agent relationship between a community and its local school district, as described by Adams and Kirst (1999). In order to rely on "the democratic emphasis of informed consent as the basis of authority" (March & Olsen, 1995 in Adams & Kirst, p. 476) policy makers in this study proclaimed that the community must be informed about the operations of the school through an "open exchange of information" (Adams & Kirst, p. 476). In HF 2272, this open exchange of information includes public reporting of student performance.

Another aspect of accountability that participants in this study mentioned is standardization in the form of quantifiable measures of student performance. Although student performance has always been a part of determining the quality

of educational systems, quantifying that performance in standardized forms has become a stronger emphasis in recent reforms (Adams & Kirst, 1999).

Participants in this study who referred to accountability as the ability to compare and rank schools based on achievement test data would most likely agree with a definition of accountability that includes “a renewed emphasis on ‘quality’ as defined by quantifiable indicators of achievement” (Kuchapski, 1998, p. 533), since quantified indicators are easiest to compare.

Fiscal accountability was also frequently mentioned by those interviewed in this study as in the words of one participant, “What can we do to assure our taxpayers that our money’s being well spent, that our schools are doing a good job? So I think it’s some accountability back to them, as legislators, back to the taxpayers because they are asking people to keep paying taxes.” This concept of accountability is expressed by Firestone and Fuhrman (1991) as the political rationale for educational standards, which “establish the parameters for the accountability that the public receives in return for its substantial dedication of resources” (p. 241).

What Was the Policy Problem?

Iowa policy makers were no doubt sensitized – and receptive -- to the idea of education accountability legislation because of these “prevailing winds” surrounding the state. In order for a policy change to be considered, policy makers must see a need for a change – a problem that is unsolved or a goal that is unmet (Rist, 1998; Rosenthal, 1998). Did policy makers in Iowa see a problem

that needed fixing? According to participants in this study, most were satisfied that Iowa schools were doing a good job. Many participants expressed sentiments similar to one who stated, "No, nothing was broken." Yet, as Adams and Kirst (1999) state, "a call for excellence and accountability presupposes a broad perception that both attributes are lacking from schools" (p. 466). Though participants in this study claimed they believed Iowa had been doing a good job in educating its citizens, they mentioned vague doubts and a general uncertainty about the quality of education throughout the nation. Indeed, declining test scores in Iowa were a cause for alarm. Whether policy makers indeed thought there was a problem with the schools in Iowa is unclear. However, participants in this study made it clear that they wanted to find out. Policy makers in this study felt strongly that Iowa's reputation as a leading education state was in jeopardy, and felt that HF 2272 was initiated in response to that fear. It was exceedingly clear that retaining Iowa's reputation as a leading education state was important. One likely motivation is that Iowa policy makers, like policy makers in other states, understand the connection between education and economic health (Mazonni, 1994).

Ultimate Aim Was to Improve Schools.

Constructing a concept of the policy problem is necessary for policy makers to be able to articulate goals and to select the appropriate policy instrument to address the problem (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987). Participants in this study never clearly articulated a problem, though offered several thoughts –

the need for more information to know if schools are indeed 'broken', the necessity of complying with federal requirements, the danger of losing Iowa's reputation as a leading education state. Although it is unclear whether or not there was ever consensus on the concept of the 'policy problem' that HF 2272 was designed to solve, there was consensus – in a broad sense—on the goals for this solution. The various goals for this legislation, as expressed by the participants in this study, all aimed for one objective -- to improve the educational system in Iowa. Participants were quite specific about the ways that they speculated HF 2272 would work to bring about this ultimate goal, and were able to articulate their implicit theories of action. The concept of a theory of action has been used to "construct the chain of objectives" of a policy, to identify the "immediate, intermediate and ultimate aims" and to "make explicit the assumptions about all of the linkages necessary for the accomplishment of the ultimate outcomes" (Patton, 1978, p. 183). While there was some variation on these theories, most participants saw the 'chain of objectives' as based on one of two central assumptions.

Theory of Action #1

The first theory of action that participants articulated was based on a concept prevalent in reform literature – that is, that public reporting of student achievement data will increase performance (Adams & Kirst, 1999; Fuhrman, 1999). The theory follows a chain of logic that proceeds roughly as follows: Mandating public reporting of student achievement data will cause schools to

focus more on student achievement. Additionally, public reporting will draw the attention of the community in evaluating the achievement data. Schools and communities will communicate more about student achievement, which will encourage at least one of several different responses. The most hopeful response brings the community and school together in planning for and supporting a shared goal – that of continuous improvement of the local schools as measured by student achievement data and other information that the community finds valuable. Based on a concept of democracy as “a system for turning the work of the community back over to the community” (Reich, 1988, p. 202), this response is reminiscent of the claim made by Mathews (1996) that a successful government is one in which citizens “claim responsibility for and act on their problem” (p. 24). Community involvement leading to community support and pride was mentioned frequently by participants in the study. Other responses to public reporting were mentioned as well. Some participants felt that public reporting would improve schools by allowing parents to compare school districts based on achievement data. If the scores of their district were not on par with other districts, they agreed with Merrow (2001) that “parents would not stand for it” (p.656) and would place pressure on schools to improve these scores. A third response to public reporting of achievement data may find parents choosing to opt out of districts where achievement data does not meet their expectations. In Iowa, this may manifest as a bid for open enrollment, private or home

schooling, or pressure on policy makers to adopt alternative educational options such as vouchers or charter schools.

Theory of Action #2

A second theory of action articulated by several participants was based on a concept of "survival of the fittest". The chain of logic for this second theory proceeds as follows: The amount of resources required to comply with HF 2272 would overburden those districts with the most limited resources. Therefore, these districts would not be able to comply, and would be forced to seek consolidation with other districts in order to garner the necessary resources for accreditation requirements. For those policy makers who feel that the smallest districts in the state are the least effective, closing or consolidating these districts would result in an overall increase in the quality of districts throughout the state.

What Happened in the Process?

Many participants in this study commented on the form of HF 2272; the fact that the bill itself was brief and written in general terms. Policy that is vague and loosely written is subject to a wide range of interpretation throughout the process. It has been well documented that ambiguous and inexplicit goals often lead to policy problems at the point of adoption (Bardach, 1977). It was during the rules making process that many participants claimed that the substance of HF 2272 changed dramatically. This should not have been a surprise to the politically savvy among the policy makers – indeed, some participants felt this shift was part of the plan all along. As HF 2272 evolved from the bill passed in

the legislature to the rules and regulations set forth in code, more specificity was necessary for implementation. It is the form that this specificity took that caught some policy makers unaware, and to which they were the most critical.

Other policy makers were not so much startled by the amount of standardization in the regulations, but surprised by the difficulties that implementation brought. Liggett and Johnston (1997) state that "often the problems of policy failure are caused by unrealistically high expectations" (p. 19). Policy makers developing HF 2272 did not necessarily have unrealistic expectations about the impact of the policy. Rather, their misconceptions about the ease with which HF2272 would be implemented were based on unrealistic perceptions about the degree to which all schools in the state were prepared for this policy. Gathering their tacit knowledge from a small number of school districts (and these most likely the more active and vocal school districts), policy makers assumed that ALL school districts were ready for what they saw as the next step in the school improvement process. It was not until after the impacts of implementation began to surface that policy makers realized this was not the case.

After the Fact

Although there was a mixed opinion about whether or not HF 2272 was "good policy," policy makers recalled different perceptions of the bill after it was passed than at the time the vote was taken. Some participants felt that the bill and its implementation process were evolving as designed. Other participants in

this study were cognizant of many of the flaws of HF 2272 as they perceived them after policy adoption. Whether these concerns were due to policy design or to shifting intents and 'implementation games' was not a part of the hindsight wisdom offered by policy makers. Nevertheless, four years after voting to pass it, they were able to recognize some of the implementation problems that arose from implementing HF 2272.

One of the biggest concerns that participants voiced was the fact that HF 2272 was an unfunded mandate. It has been mentioned already that the capacity of all schools to implement 2272 had been overestimated —this makes support in the form of funding and technical assistance all the more necessary. With any mandate, at least a minimal level of resources is necessary for implementation (Liggett & Johnston, 1997); yet policy makers adopted 2272 without the provision of any additional resources.

Other concerns mentioned by policy makers were less tangible, but potentially more detrimental. The reporting requirements of 2272 represent shifts in both the type of information gathered and the distribution of this information. Many participants reflected on the consequences of establishing standardized measurements as 'primary' accountability tools, particularly a narrowing of curriculum, and resulting mutation of the educational process. Certainly these concerns are similar to those being expressed in other states where accountability measures have been mandated and used for high stakes decisions (Elmore, 2002; Sirotnik, 2002). While the stakes in Iowa are not yet as

high as in many states, some participants in this study wondered if HF 2272 was leading Iowa in that direction. Of particular concern for some was the sense that the decision making power for schools was being siphoned from local communities to the state. As Cibulka (1990) reminds us, "The control of information . . . is a political question as much as a technical one. What is at stake is a potential shift of authority ...between state and local officials" (p.186). And as participants in this study would remind us, the precept of local authority -- and control -- is a powerful one in Iowa.

History might lead us to believe that, if mutual adaptations are allowed to occur, policy implementation eventually will begin to address the goals that policy makers intended (McLaughlin, 1987; Odden, 1991). If the policy spawned by HF 2272 is allowed to evolve in this manner, some of the implementation concerns expressed by participants in this study may be alleviated with time. However, this fact does not justify stab-in-the-dark, one-shot-at-a-time policy development. As a few participants in this study reflected, school improvement is worthy of more thoughtful, long-range analysis that allows for policy based on sound theory. Sirotnik (2002) declares that changing complex institutions -- like school systems-- is neither simple nor immediate. One participant compared the development of HF 2272 to "grabbing the wrong sized wrench to tighten a bolt." Given the complex and multiple factors that impact the abilities of schools to perform their various responsibilities, policy development needs to involve more than the correct wrench. It requires explicit definition of policy goals, sound

theories for acting on those goals, adequate support and resources for implementation, and careful analysis of impact – and adaptation -- before, during, and after implementation.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

This report summarizes a qualitative research study on education accountability and related state policy development in Iowa. The study was based on a model of naturalistic inquiry. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 26 state level policy makers including current and former legislators, policy advisors, and State Department of Education personnel. Data was collected through the interview process as well as through the inspection of bill drafts, press releases, commission reports, the Iowa Code and Administrative Rules, as well as other pertinent documents. Data collection, evaluation and analysis were guided by three central questions: What factors led Iowa policy makers to enact HF 2272, the Accountability for Student Achievement Act? What did policy makers intend HF 2272 to accomplish? How do policy makers view HF 2272 four years after its passage? Four conclusions were drawn from the findings of this study. One conclusion is that the factors leading to the development and enactment of HF 2272 had multiple sources, most of which originated outside of Iowa. Secondly, falling test scores in Iowa led policy makers to develop policy in an effort to retain/restore Iowa's reputation as a leading education state. The third conclusion drawn from this study is that education policy development can be influenced by political factors that have little to do with educational quality. Finally, policy makers spent more time reflecting

on the impact of HF 2272 in Iowa after its passage than they did before voting on the bill.

Conclusions

Pressures Originating Outside of Iowa Created Conditions That Made Iowa Ripe for Educational Accountability Legislation.

Much of the pressure to create educational accountability legislation in Iowa originated from forces outside of Iowa. Though Iowa was slower to jump on the 'reform by standards' bandwagon, HF2272 mirrored the trend across the states by calling for more specific measures of accountability from local school districts. Participants in the study acknowledged influence from the business community and the pressure to fall in line with the rest of the country. These national political trends culminated in requirements for accountability in the re-authorization of ESEA. This was most likely the influence that shifted the balance in Iowa. Compliance --or at least a compromise with -- with federal legislation was a frequently stated reason for considering this type of legislation.

Policymakers revealed a somewhat schizophrenic view, however, as they simultaneously cited both desires for conforming with the rest of the nation and for remaining the "only hold-out" state. Conformity and compliance (or perhaps, more accurately, the repercussions of non-compliance) are seen as important, but only -- with typical Midwestern stubbornness -- if allowed to "do it our way." Policymakers were unwilling to relinquish one of their most fervently held identities -- Iowa as the local control state -- merely for the sake of compliance. In

the words of one participant, Iowa was not about to "just roll over and play dead." The idea of HF 2272 may have originated with federal legislation, but the intent of HF 2272 was not simply to comply with federal requirements. Policymakers had other purposes for HF2272 as well – purposes driven more by specifically Iowan factors.

Policymakers Responded to the Threat of Losing Iowa's Reputation as a Leader in Education.

In addition to an identity based on local control, policy makers recognized how important it was for Iowa to be regarded as a leading educational state. "That's always been our hallmark," remarked one participant. As a vague sense of uncertainty about public education converged with declining test scores in the state, a fear arose that Iowa's number one in education claim was being threatened. Alarms were sounded in the state policy arena and, in the words of one participant, "the legislature got a little panicky." HF2272 was most likely enacted as much in response to this perceived danger as it was in response to federal legislation compliance. Policy makers declared that the intent of HF2272 was to increase educational achievement in the state in order to reclaim Iowa's status as a leader in education. Though lawmakers were unanimous in supporting this bill, and reverberating the public intent of improving our schools, their theories about how HF2272 would improve education were anything but unanimous. Theories of action ranged from a renewed focus on student achievement to community involvement and strengthened local control. Still

others felt that HF2272 should improve the overall educational quality in Iowa through a sort of "social Darwinism" in which only the fittest schools would survive. It is one thing to rally the forces publicly to agree with the goal of improved schools, yet another story to agree publicly on the best avenues for reaching that goal. Additionally, policy makers were influenced by factors that were less public and related more to political goals than to school improvement goals.

Educational Policy Making Isn't Just About Education.

One of the ways that policy makers remain policy makers is to satisfy their constituents. Enacting legislation for the purpose of improving schools certainly plays well in the ever-present re-election rhetoric. However, when HF 2272 was passed, participants of this study were convinced that there were also some "behind the scenes" intents never publicly acknowledged. Like the factors that led up to HF2272, the covert intents of the bill had both local and national influences. On the state political front, there was the perception that HF 2272 was "just another jab at teachers," indicative of the growing rift between the educational community and some state politicians. Some felt that the bill was payback for educational associations publicly supporting one political party over the other; others thought that the bill was a response to the perception that "K-12 schools are spoiled" and demand more than their share of tax dollars without being expected to show anything in return. On the national front, some participants felt that educational accountability legislation is one piece of a larger

political agenda – an agenda that has as among its ultimate goals the undermining of (and subsequent withdrawal of support for) public education.

Lawmakers Spent More Time Considering the Impact of HF 2272 After Its Passage Than Before Voting to Support It.

Much has been made of the speed with which HF 2272 was introduced and voted upon – garnering unanimous support in both chambers of the Iowa Legislature, and promptly being signed into law by the governor. It seems that not until after the bill was passed, when the ramifications of implementation began to be apparent, that policy makers spent time analyzing the impact of the bill they had passed. Many participants claimed that the bill turned out to be “different than what we thought we were passing,” and bemoaned the fact that the rules process converted HF 2272 – a very short, very general piece of legislation – into regulations requiring more intrusion and control than they might have envisioned. Other participants felt that policymakers were simply unaware of the wide variation among school districts in readiness for this step in the school improvement process. They erroneously assumed that ALL (or at least most) school districts had already been following some of the procedures that now became part of the mandated regulations. For whatever reason, policy makers indeed confirmed that hindsight was certainly clearer than foresight; at least in the case of HF 2272.

Further clarity in hindsight vision evolved as policy makers started to hear about – or experience -- the unintended consequences of the implementation of

HF2272. Many expressed concerns at the intense time and resource demands placed on school districts, and wondered if the pay-offs for these demands would have any impact on positive school improvement. Some participants were concerned that the bill didn't go far enough, and therefore would not have the intended outcomes. Concerns were also expressed about the meaningfulness of the process that school districts were mandated to use, and concerned about the impact on curriculum and overall student development.

Perhaps the most fervent reflection is represented by those who stated that Iowa would be better off if HF2272 had not been passed at all, and who wished that they could rescind their votes supporting the bill. A few participants acknowledged the concept that meaningful school improvement takes time, accurate assessment and information, foresight, and comprehensive planning – none of which occurred in the enactment of HF 2272.

Implications

The following implications are not directly demonstrable from the findings, but are based on conclusions, literature base and personal reflection.

Educational Accountability Policy in Iowa – As Described by HF 2272 – Was Designed Without Firm Definition of the Policy Problem.

Without a well-articulated policy problem, designing an effective solution is all but impossible. The national trends may have been powerful and tempting influences on Iowa policy makers, but the policy they inspired may not have been a good fit for the actual condition of Iowa schools. In order to design policy that

fits not only the state's political context, but also addresses specific needs and concerns in the state, policy makers needed to have accurate information about the "state of the state's schools." Without this information, policy makers were unable to define an explicit need that existed in Iowa, and thus were unable to define a specific goal for policy design.

Writing HF 2272 in General Terms Led to Shifts Throughout the Process.

With only a vague notion of a policy problem and less than complete information about the state of the entire state's schools, policy makers were able to define only a general goal for the desired outcome of 2272. Thus, the legislation was written in general terms. It should have been no surprise that this bill 'mutated' from the original perceptions that policy makers claim they had about the bill when they voted to approve it. A general bill will be more likely to change in the process than one that explicitly defines intent and mechanism. In the case of HF 2272, necessary dialogue about what the bill means and how it would be implemented did not occur throughout the policy design process. The absence of this dialogue resulted in policy quite different than what many participants expected.

The Theories of Action by Which Iowa Policy Makers Intended HF 2272 to Improve Education Were Based on Uncertain Assumptions.

As Bardach (1977) reminds us, "it is impossible to implement well a policy or program that is defective in its basic theoretical conception" (p. 250). The priority goal, not explicitly stated, appeared to be to restore Iowa's reputation as a

leading education state. Based (at least partially) on positive intentions and a sincere belief in the sacredness of local control, the theories by which policy makers planned to reach this goal were questionable. As outlined in the previous chapter, two distinct theories of action were articulated as avenues to improved education. The first theory is based on assumptions that public reporting of achievement data will lead to closer community ties with local schools, that these closer ties will lead to more support and pressure provided by the community for school improvement. The second theory espouses an assumption that the state would be better off without its smallest school districts, so the path to school improvement is through accreditation procedures too resource intensive for those smallest districts to be able to comply. A closer inspection of either of the two theories might have led policy makers to predict some of the implementation problems that arose with HF 2272. A number of points along the 'chain of objectives' were based on assumptions that were, at best, questionable in the context of Iowa schools and policy environment. Especially in the absence of support provided for this mandate, it seems naïve to assume that sharing information about student achievement will directly and automatically lead to improved schools. It seems equally naïve to assume that a covert attempt to force consolidation on smaller districts would not be recognized for what it is.

Expediency of Policy Adoption Was Chosen in Lieu of Careful Reflection About the Possible Impacts of HF 2772.

Spurred by a political call to action, policy makers in Iowa voted unanimously to pass HF 2272 just a few weeks after the bill had been introduced. This short window of decision making did not allow for policy makers to 'think forward' and carefully reflect about the impacts that such legislation might have. In hindsight, policy makers expressed numerous concerns about the impact of HF 2272. Yet, many of these concerns could have been predicted. Some of the 'hindsight' concerns about the impact of HF 2272 arose because policy makers did not seek accurate information about conditions throughout the state before passing of the bill. Other significant concerns – for example, the lack of funding and process support – could have been alleviated with alterations in policy design before adoption.

Using Educational Policy as a Political Arena Lead to Negative Consequences for Iowa Schools.

Sending unspoken messages through policy mandates negatively affected the daily school environment. Impacts of this policy may lead to erosion of the rich, meaningful education that the students of the state now experience. Both policy makers and educators shared values of strong local control and an educational system that supports the state both economically and ethically. Playing out the political rift between these two parties through policy development was counterproductive in attaining

what both wanted – a top-ranked, high quality educational system for Iowa's citizens.

Recommendations for Improving Educational Policy Process in Iowa
Gather Accurate and Iowa-Specific Information to Articulate Explicit Policy Problems and Policy Goals.

Good policy, like good education, is not "one size fits all." Just as educators design instruction to meet the needs of their students, policy needs to be designed to fit the problem it is intended to fix. Bardach (1977) states that "Any social program worth having a governmental policy about at all is likely to be a serious and complicated problem and therefore not amenable to easy solution" (p. 251). The conditions that lead to the need for policy intervention in education are both complex and multi-faceted. Designing general, one-size-fits-all legislation is like grabbing the wrong sized wrench because the size and type of bolt is unknown. One way to improve the accuracy of the information needed to develop sound educational policy would be to meaningfully include those in the educational community, the 'street level bureaucrats' in the policy design dialogue.

The Theory of Action by Which a Policy Intends to Reach Its Goals Needs to Be Based on Credible Assumptions.

In addition to good information, policy makers need good theory to make good policy. At the very least, the questions offered by Liggett and Johnston (1997) need to be asked by policy makers: "If the plan was carried out, would it

genuinely improve schools? Is the manner in which we are thinking about carrying out the plan theoretically convincing – or at least does it make sense, from experience, that it would work?” (p.19)

Realize That Voting on a Bill Is Only One Piece of the Policy Process.

More dialogue about the potential impacts (foreseen and unforeseen) of policy is needed throughout the process. ‘Forward thinking’ is possible, though perhaps not as easily – and as predictably-- as hindsight. Both policy makers and educational community members need to assume responsibility for designing good policy that doesn’t impact the ‘clients’ of the policy detrimentally. Changes are easier to bring about at the beginning of the journey than correcting the course midstream.

Policy makers have the responsibility to be attentive to the development of rules and regulations for implementation of the bill. With clearly defined goals, rules can be checked for consistency and faithful alignment to the originally defined intents. Policy makers can hold themselves as accountable for this step in the process as much as they do for introducing and voting on a bill. The consequences of a policy changing through process shifts and ‘implementation games’ should be predictable – and predicted.

Political Disagreements Need to Be Resolved Without Negatively Impacting Policy.

Political battles that impede the goal of school improvement are both ineffective and irresponsible. Given that policy makers and educators both share

values in local control and high quality education, there is certainly some room for common ground. The shift in educational policy that 2272 predicts for the state may be charting a course fraught with more negative impacts, and in a direction that is not easily retracted. Wise (1979) would remind us that, “once policy makers have intervened in educational policy making, they are less inclined to defer to the local schools” (p. 53).

Sincere communication and collaboration of knowledge and resources are better paths to a shared vision for the state. Building a system of quality education that will meet the needs of the state’s society into the 21st century is a complex task and one of paramount importance. It will take commitment, cooperation, and resources to accomplish successfully. Smith and O’Day (1990) offer advice that would be well-heeded by policy makers and the educational community:

Perhaps the most important single change in the educational governance system in many states would be to move the policy debate to a point where it is considering the substantive – and to a lesser extent the political – aspects of alternative, well-formed, and long-term policies and strategies (p. 257).

Recommendations for Further Study

In order to inform the policy process, further study may be helpful in a number of areas. Specific questions arose from my perceptions of the process based on this study, leading to suggestion for areas of further exploration.

Does Public Reporting of Student Achievement Lead to Improved Student Achievement?

Educational accountability policy frequently bases its design on the assumption that public reporting of student achievement leads to improved student achievement. Such policies have been in effect for a number of years in several locations, Iowa not with standing. Has there been any evidence that the assumption underlying many theories of action in educational accountability policy holds true?

Does Increased Achievement Data Indicate Improved Education?

What evidence is there that increased student achievement indicates the improved quality of the schools involved? In light of many of the substantiated impacts on high stakes accountability policies, some exploration of other avenues for evaluating the quality of schools is warranted.

How Can Communication Between Policy Makers and the Educational Community Be Enhanced?

Communication between policy makers and policy implementers seems paramount in the analysis of policy design. Are there known methods by which this communication can be enhanced? Feedback loops between educational policy influentials and the educational community seem a promising factor in the development of good educational policy. Further research regarding effective methods of collaboration and communication may help to inform and support this endeavor.

Do We Need to Be Asking Different Questions?

In closing, I'd like to share a suggestion that John Wahlke (1978a) phrased which I believe has implications for researchers, policy makers, and policy implementers:

The questions asked by legislation research should change from those preoccupied with explaining why a representative body may have decided as it did to questions about what happens to it and to its public when it decides things as it does. It may be more difficult to attack such questions through political research. But, also we are more likely to learn something important about the political system from doing so (p. 174).

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APPENDIXES

- A. House File 2272
- B. Interview Protocol
- C. Consent to Participate Form

Appendix A – HF 2272

Appendix A

House File 2272

PAG LIN

1 1

HOUSE FILE 2272

1 2

1 3

AN ACT

1 4 REQUIRING THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION TO ADOPT RULES

1 5 RELATING TO THE INCORPORATION OF ACCOUNTABILITY FOR

1 6 STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT INTO THE EDUCATION STANDARDS AND

1 7 ACCREDITATION PROCESS.

1 8

1 9 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF IOWA:

1 10

1 11 Section 1. Section 256.7, Code 1997, is amended by adding
 1 12 the following new subsection:

1 13 NEW SUBSECTION. 21. Develop and adopt rules by July 1,
 1 14 1999, incorporating accountability for student achievement
 1 15 into the standards and accreditation process described in
 1 16 section 256.11. The rules shall provide for all of the
 1 17 following:

1 18 a. Requirements that all school districts and accredited
 1 19 nonpublic schools develop, implement, and file with the
 1 20 department a comprehensive school improvement plan that
 1 21 includes, but is not limited to, demonstrated school,
 1 22 parental, and community involvement in assessing educational
 1 23 needs, establishing local education standards and student
 1 24 achievement levels, and, as applicable, the consolidation of
 1 25 federal and state planning, goal-setting, and reporting
 1 26 requirements.

1 27 b. A set of core academic indicators in mathematics and
 1 28 reading in grades four, eight, and eleven, a set of core
 1 29 academic indicators in science in grades eight and eleven, and
 1 30 another set of core indicators that includes, but is not
 1 31 limited to, graduation rate, postsecondary education, and
 1 32 successful employment in Iowa. Annually, the department shall
 1 33 report state data for each indicator in the condition of
 1 34 education report.

1 35 c. A requirement that all school districts and accredited
 2 1 nonpublic schools annually report to the department and the
 2 2 local community the district-wide progress made in attaining
 2 3 student achievement goals on the academic and other core
 2 4 indicators and the district-wide progress made in attaining
 2 5 locally established student learning goals. The school
 2 6 districts and accredited nonpublic schools shall demonstrate
 2 7 the use of multiple assessment measures in determining student
 2 8 achievement levels. The school districts and accredited
 2 9 nonpublic schools may report on other locally determined
 2 10 factors influencing student achievement. The school districts
 2 11 and accredited nonpublic schools shall also report to the
 2 12 local community their results by individual attendance center.

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2 35 TERRY E. BRANSTAD

3 1 Governor

RON J. CORBETT
Speaker of the House

MARY E. KRAMER
President of the Senate

I hereby certify that this bill originated in the House and
is known as House File 2272, Seventy-seventh General Assembly.

ELIZABETH ISAACSON
Chief Clerk of the House

Approved _____, 1998

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

☞ In 1998, the Iowa Legislature passed HF 2272, often referred to as the school accountability bill. I'm interested in understanding the reasons that this bill was introduced and passed -- interested in your perceptions of the bill and its legislative intent.

1. Tell me what you remember about the origin of the bill, HF 2272.
2. Was the bill intended to make a change in Iowa's educational system?
Possible probe: What "problem" /concern was the bill trying to address?
3. Where do you think the idea for this bill came from?
4. What was {do you believe} the bill designed to do?
5. Were there any groups/individuals particularly interested in the passage of this bill?
6. What were some of the reasons that it was supported?
7. Where there any groups/individuals that were particularly opposed to its passage?
8. What were some of the reasons it was opposed?
8. How do you think the bill is working?
Probe: Is the bill being implemented as intended? (Why do you think so /not ?)
Probe: What kind of information are you getting about the implementation of the bill?
10. Has the implementation of the bill had the kind of impact that was expected?
11. Is there anything you would change about the bill if you had the chance?
12. Is there anyone else who has particular knowledge about this bill that I should also speak with?

Appendix C

Interviewee Consent Form

Research Study: Transforming Iowa Schools: An Inside Look at Educational Accountability Policy

The purpose of this funded research study is to study the process of school transformation in Iowa by conducting a policy implementation study of Iowa's comprehensive school improvement and accountability mandate. In its simplest form, this research project asks two questions: 1) how is Iowa's mandate for school improvement actually working? 2) how could it be redesigned to work better? A research team is interviewing approximately 120 people, including state legislators, teachers, administrators and state and local policy makers who have been identified as people best able to respond to these questions.

The interviews are approximately 30 minutes in length and are being conducted during the fall of 2001 and the spring/ summer of 2002. The findings of the study will be made public; however, your name and position will not be used and the data will not be reported in any way that you can be identified. Your signature indicates you understand the purpose and process of the study and that you give us permission to use the information in disseminating the results.

Please be aware that your participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without repercussion. If you have any questions regarding the study or participation in it, please feel free to contact us at the number listed below. Also, we will be happy to share our findings from the study when it is completed.

Date: _____

Interviewee (Please print your name and position)

Name: _____

Position: _____

Signature: _____

Research Team:	Perry Johnston Carole Richardson	Annette Liggett Kim Thuente	Jennifer Lindaman Denny Wulf
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Signature of Research Team Member: _____
Drake University – 515-271-3719